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Where the global meets the local: notes from the sitting room

DAVID MORLEY

This paper is concerned with the place of ethnographic studies of media consumption in the analysis of the simultaneous dynamics of globalization, localization and domestication in contemporary culture The key issue is that of the status of small scale studies of micro-process(es) in the analysis of these macro-issues The argument of the paper is that it is precisely through such detailed 'domestic' or 'local' studies that we will most effectively grasp the significance of the processes of globalization and localization (or homogenization and fragmentation) which have been widely identified as central to contemporary (or even postmodern) culture

Clearly, any analysis which ultimately offers us *only* an understanding of the micro-process of consumption in this or that domestic context, without reference to the broader cultural (political and ideological) questions at stake, is going to be, ultimately, of only limited value That way lies the 'so what?' problem. however fine-grained our analyses, we end up with nothing more than an endless set of descriptions of the processes of consumption Conversely, any analysis of these macro-processes which is not grounded in an adequate understanding of the complexities of the process of (principally domestic) consumption runs the equal and opposite risk of being so over-schematic as to hide all the differences that matter Put another way, it is a question of steering between the dangers of an improper romanticism of 'consumer freedoms', on the one hand, and a paranoiac fantasy of 'global control' on the other It is, as Murdock argues, a question of finding ways of combining interpretative studies of people's 'lifeworlds' with attempts to map the contours of the wider formations that envelop and organize them [1]

1 Graham Murdock 'Critical enquiry and audience activity in B Dervin et al (eds) *Rethinking Communications* vol 2 (London Sage 1989)

I shall attempt to address these issues, in the first instance by reviewing some recent debates about the consumption of television and the 'activity' of the television audience

Romantic readings?

2 See Jane Feuer Dynasty', paper to International Television Studies Conference London 1986, John Hartley Invisible fictions', *Textual Practice* vol 1 no 2 (1987) James Clifford and George Marcus *Writing Culture* (Berkeley University of California Press 1986)

3 See James Curran The new revisionism in mass communications research *European Journal of Communications* vol 5 nos 2–3 (1990), see also *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* vol 7 no 2 (1990) special issue on Reading Recent Revisionism'

4 Meaghan Morris, Banality in cultural studies *Block*, no 14 (1988), p 15

5 cf Charlotte Brunsdon Text and audience' in Ellen Seiter et al (eds), *Remote Control* (London Routledge 1989), Staffan Ericson, 'Theorising popular fiction', in Michael Skovmand (ed), *Media Fictions* (Aarhus Aarhus University Press 1989), Jostein Gripsrud High culture revisited , *Cultural Studies*, vol 3 no 2 (1989) Michael Schudson, The new validation of popular culture *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* vol 4, no 1 (1987) Charlotte Brunsdon Problems with quality *Screen*, vol 31 no 1 (1990)

6 Murdock, Critical enquiry Morris Banality in cultural studies', Paul Willemen Review of *Sex, Class and Realism British Cinema 1956–63* by John Hill , in Manuel Alvarado and John O Thompson (eds) *The Media Reader* (London BFI 1990)

7 Murdock, 'Critical enquiry pp 228–9

8 Morris Banality in cultural studies'

If, for much of the 1970s, the audience was largely ignored by many media theorists in favour of the analysis of textual and economic structures which were presumed to impose their effects on the audience, the 1980s, conversely, saw a sudden flourishing of 'audience' (or 'reception') studies However, the more recent period has also seen a small but significant flurry of articles and papers questioning whether all (or indeed, any) of this audience research is getting us anywhere.

On the one hand there are the methodological difficulties pointed to by Feuer, Hartley and Clifford and Marcus all of which raise doubts about the validity and viability of recent empirical audience research.[2] At the same time Curran has argued that what he calls the 'new revisionism' of reception studies, which, he claims, has come to dominate the field, is in fact only rediscovering wheels invented years ago, and amounts to little more than 'revivalism masquerading as new and innovatory thought'[3] – a charge not far removed from that of Morris when she claims that much audience work in cultural studies is, in effect, 'banal' [4] A whole series of scholars have now argued that contemporary audience researchers, in their desire to avoid a 'hypodermic' effects model, have ended up uncritically celebrating the supposed 'creativity' of the audience and, in effect, endorsing the worst commercial products, on the grounds that if they're popular then they are, *ipso facto*, good.[5] I shall not attempt to deal here with all of those critiques but will focus on those offered by Murdock, Morris and Willemen.[6] Murdock's argument is that

> In their eagerness to reassert the skillfulness of audiences   .
> most proponents   of the 'new ethnography' have tended to
> skate round questions of power As a result, the issue of the
> audience's relation to control within the media system is
> conspicuous by its absence . . . as are wider questions about the
> way these relations are structured in turn by the unequal
> distribution of material and symbolic resources.[7]

In a somewhat similar vein Morris sums up what she takes to be the cosy (old-fashioned) 'Cultural Studies' orthodoxy in relation to the audience and the question of 'reading' [8] As she notes, many versions of this 'theory' have now been offered – from John Fiske's notion of a 'reader's liberation movement', though Mica Nava's analyses of the 'contradictions of consumerism', to Iain Chambers'

9 John Fiske: *Television Culture* (London Methuen 1987) Mica Nava Consumerism and its contradictions, *Cultural Studies* vol 1 no 2 (1987), Iain Chambers *Popular Culture* (London Methuen 1986)

10 Morris, 'Banality in cultural studies p 22

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London Routledge, 1984) see also his 'Cultural reproduction and social reproduction', in Richard Brown (ed) *Knowledge Education and Cultural Change* (London Tavistock 1973)

12 Richard Nice 'Pierre Bourdieu a 'vulgar materialist" in the sociology of culture' *Screen Education*, no 28 (1978)

13 David Morley *Family Television* (London Comedia, 1986)

accounts of counter-hegemonic forces in popular culture, all extolling the creative energies of the much-maligned consumers of popular culture.[9] As far as Morris is concerned, the 'Ur-thesis' of this kind of Cultural Studies runs perilously close to the banal observation that, as she puts it 'people in modern mechanized societies are complex and contradictory; mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory; therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture' [10]

I would agree with Morris that some of this work is indeed problematic, but for a rather different reason than that which she adduces. For me, it is the lack of a sufficiently sociological dimension to Fiske's or Chambers's work that is the problem. Certainly if, as Morris notes, our analyses finally say only that 'it's always complex and contradictory' then that is a banal observation The point, however, is, in my view, an *empirical* one the question is one of understanding (and here I continue to believe that Bourdieu has much to offer in this respect[11]) just *how* 'complex' or 'contradictory' it is, for *which* types of consumers, in *which* social positions, in relation to *which* types of texts or objects. The 'distinctions', in this respect, are all. If Fiske and Chambers can be faulted for failing to help us see them, Morris seems not even to believe that they are what we need to look for Everything might simply be 'complex and contradictory' at one level of abstraction, but the banality of that observation is, to my mind, ultimately a function of the level of over-abstraction of Morris's argument, and of the lack, in her own analysis, of an explicitly sociological perspective To repeat an argument made elsewhere, in this connection, an implicit sociology is often an erroneous sociology, the more insidious for being unrecognized [12]

Willemen has argued that many 'left cultural commentators' have made the 'tragic mistake' of 'conniving' with the capitalist logic of 'multinational commodification' of culture Willemen's specific point is that my own study of *Family Television*[13] for instance, is vitiated by the 'lack of attention to the capitalist logic overdetermining cultural production', in so far as, he claims, I 'construe the site of plurivocality, the space for resistance, as a space only invested by the power relations that obtain *within* family or peer group situations' (my emphasis), ignoring the powerful pre-structuring agency of capitalist cultural production, in setting all the significant boundaries to what people can do within these structures. Willemen argues that this work focuses wrongly on 'the way the TV as a piece of sound-and-image emitting furniture is used in interpersonal relations, that is, the immediate commodity aspect of the use of TV to the detriment of these broader questions. Thus, according to Willemen, the consequence is an analysis of 'the uses of TV-as-furniture' which is improperly substituted for an analysis of 'the things people can, and more importantly, cannot do with TV

14 Willemen Review of *Sex, Class and Realism'*, p 109

15 For further details of the research on The Household Uses of ICT see David Morley and Roger Silverstone, Domestic technologies *Media Culture & Society* vol 12 (1990), and Roger Silverstone David Morley et al Families, technologies & consumption', discussion paper, Centre for Research in Innovation Culture & Technology, Brunel University, 1989

16 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1984)

17 Morley *Family Television*

18 cf Anthony Giddens on structuration in his *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London Hutchinson, 1979)

19 See, Daniel Miller *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1987) Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (Harmondsworth Penguin, 1978)

discourses', and where the analysis of all the important issues of cultural power are consequently sidestepped [14]

For my part, I think that the notes of caution sounded by Murdock are entirely appropriate In the research which Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch and I have conducted on 'The Household Uses of Information and Communication Technology',[15] for example, we have not simply been concerned with the 'creative' abilities of consumers, but rather with how such 'abilities' are manifested in a situation in which, (a) the symbolic and material resources required for various forms of cultural consumption are themselves unequally distributed, and (b) such consumption practices are working in, through (and occasionally against) the powerful discourses of design, marketing, advertising and education, which have constructed the dominant definitions of these technologies and their 'appropriate' uses This, as I understand it, is the point of de Certeau's distinction between the 'strategies' of the powerful and the 'tactics' of the weak.[16] The weak are not totally powerless, but given their lack of control over institutions and resources they have to operate in the margins (temporal and spatial) defined by those who *do* control such institutional resources.

Willemen's critique is more problematic. It is clearly not the case that the only power relations relevant to the process of consumption are those that obtain '*within* family or peer group situations'. In the case of my *Family Television* study, for example, and its focus on gender relations, these are not simply an 'internal' factor of family life. Rather, the argument is that the gender roles adopted within the family, which then function as the immediate determinants of viewing practices, are themselves structured by the dominant public discourses of gender within the particular culture being researched [17]

Willemen's argument operates within a structuralist (and indeed, overly determinist) perspective which entirely reduces the micro to an effect of the macro (and reduces people to the function of '*tragers*' of their structural positions) rather than seeing structures as only themselves reproducible through agency.[18] As for the charge that *Family TV* (and by implication the Brunel HICT study) is *only* concerned with the 'uses of TV-as-furniture' in interpersonal relations, Willemen would be quite right to be concerned if that was the exclusive focus. However, the whole point of the research is that it is attempting to integrate this level of analysis, and its consequent focus on the complexities of the immediate processes of domestic consumption, with the analysis of the 'broader questions' to which Willemen refers. The argument is rather that, if we are in fact to understand their pertinence, these 'broader questions' have to be approached via this necessary detour into the detail of domestic consumption [19]

To do otherwise is finally to relegate the domestic context of television consumption, once more, to the status of mere backdrop –

20 Jennifer Daryl Slack
'Contextualising technology', in
Dervin et al (eds) *Rethinking
Communications*, p 329

21 cf Arjun Appadurai, *The Social
Life of Things* (Cambridge
Cambridge University Press
1986)

22 Stuart Hall introductory address
to International Television
Studies Conference London,
1988

23 See Morley and Silverstone,
Domestic technologies

24 cf Karl Nordenstreng on news
as ritual in his 'Policy for news
transmission in Dennis McQuail
(ed) *The Sociology of Mass
Communication* (Harmondsworth
Penguin 1972)
25 See David Morley *The
Nationwide Audience* (London
BFI 1980) for an earlier version
of this critique of Nordenstreng
(pp 7–8)
26 Roger Silverstone *The Message
of Television* (London
Heinemann 1981)

to be 'recognized' and then immediately forgotten, as if this context had no effectivity of its own. As Slack puts it 'more often than not "context" is invoked as a sort of magical term, as if by claiming to take context into consideration, one could banish the problems of its specificity' [20] The question is precisely one of addressing contextual specificity in relation to broader structural factors In fact, one might reasonably argue (*pace* Willemen) that, at least in contemporary Western Europe, attention to the 'commoditization' of television and to its transformation, as it is further incorporated into this particular 'regime of value', would in fact be very timely, in relation to the pressing political questions to which Willemen refers [21]

The objective, from this point of view, is not to substitute the one (micro) level of analysis for the other (macro) but rather to integrate the analysis of the 'broader questions' of ideology, power and politics (what Hall has described as the 'vertical' dimension of communications[22]) with the analysis of the consumption, uses and functions of television in everyday life (the 'horizontal' dimension of communications, in Hall's terms) It is not a question, finally, of understanding simply television's ideological (or representational) role, nor simply its ritual (or socially organizing) function, nor the process of its domestic (and more broadly social) consumption. It is a question of how to understand all these issues in relation to each other

Silverstone and I have argued elsewhere[23] that we need to develop a 'double focus' on television viewing, so that, for instance, we can understand viewing as, *simultaneously*, a ritual whose function is to structure domestic life and to provide a symbolic mode of participation in the national community, as an active mode of consumption, and as a process operating within the realm of ideology To debate whether we should regard television viewing as either one or the other is to miss the point Thus, for example, news watching is not to be understood as *either* 'mere ritual'[24] *or* a process of transmission of ideological (or cultural) categories,[25] but precisely as operating along both dimensions at once Indeed the notion of 'mere ritual' is itself problematic for, as Silverstone and others have argued,[26] an understanding of the rituals of television is an essential component of any understanding of its place in everyday life and, as such, a crucial aspect of ideology. Our objective, therefore, ought to be the production of analyses of the specific relationships of particular audiences to particular types of media content which are located within the broader framework of an analysis of media consumption and domestic ritual These analyses, of course, must be sensitive to empirical variation.

Communications technologies: scenarios of the future

In this section of the paper I want to try to make a number of arguments concerning (a) the question of the 'effects' of communications technologies; (b) the ways in which these technologies have been claimed to be responsible *both* for the 'fragmentation' and 'homogenization' of contemporary culture; and (c) how abstract (and technologically determinist) futuristic scenarios of this kind need to be informed by the analysis of the economic, social and cultural determinations of technology's impact, 'take up' and use

Erni argues bluntly that 'in the context of the enormous changes in television technology' (such as the increasing use of VCR technology and the development of 'television-computer-telephone hybrids') audience research work focusing on broadcast television 'becomes somewhat obsolete'.[27] In a not dissimilar vein Lindlof and Meyer argue that the 'interactive' capacities of recent technological developments fundamentally transform the position of the consumer As they put it:

> .   with increasing adoption of technological add-ons for the basic
> media delivery systems, the messages can be edited, deleted,
> rescheduled or skipped past with complete disregard for their
> original form The received notion of the mass communications
> audience has simply little relevance for the reality of mediated
> communication.[28]

The technological advances are often seen to have transformative (if not utopian) consequences for the television audience. Thus, in the Italian context, R A I's publicity claims that:

> The new telematic services, video recorders and video discs . .
> will make a more personal use of the medium possible. The user
> will be able to decide what to watch when he [*sic*] wants. It will
> be possible, then, to move beyond that fixed mass audience which
> has been characteristic of TV's history· everybody will be able to
> do his [*sic*] own programming.[29]

The problem, of course, is that many of these arguments run the danger of abstracting these technologies' intrinsic 'capacities' from the social contexts of their actual use. In understanding such technological developments, we could usefully follow Bausinger in his concern with the question of how these technologies are integrated into the structure and routines of domestic life – into what he calls 'the specific semantics of the everyday'. His basic thesis is that technologies are increasingly 'absorbed' into the everyday ('everyone owns a number of machines, and has directly to handle technical products') so that everyday routines themselves are constructed around technologies – which then become effectively

27 John Erni Where is the audience? , *Journal of Communication Enquiry* vol 13 no 2 (1989)

28 Tom Lindlof and Timothy Meyer Mediated communication', in Tom Lindlof (ed), *Natural Audiences* (Norwood Ablex, 1987) p 2

29 Quoted in Ian Connell and Lidia Curti Popular broadcasting in Italy and Britain , in Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds) *Television in Transition* (London BFI 1985) p 99

30 Herman Bausinger 'Media technology and everyday life' *Media Culture and Society* vol 6, no 4 (1984), p 346

'invisible' in their domestication The end result, he argues, is the 'inconspicuous omnipresence of the technical' [30] The key point is to understand the processes through which communications and information technologies are 'domesticated' to the point where they become inconspicuous, if not invisible, within the home. The further point is then to focus on the culturally-constructed meanings of these technologies, as they are 'produced' through located practices of consumption I will return to these points later in the paper. First, however, I want to note the parallel between these arguments about the individualizing effects of these new communications technologies and those postmodern scenarios which simultaneously point to their homogenizing effects

No sense of place?

We might begin with the well-known postmodern theorist Marshall McLuhan, who, of course, argued that the effect of television and computer technology was to erase time–space differences and to herald a new audiovisual age of global *Gemeinschaft*. Thus McLuhan and Fiore argued:

> Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of 'time' and 'space' and pours upon us incessantly and continually the concerns of all other men . . Ours is a brand new world of 'allatonceness'. 'Time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished We now live in a global village . . . .[31]

31 Quoted in Marjorie Ferguson, 'Electronic media and the redefining of time and space' in her *Public Communication* (London Sage 1989) p 163

32 James Carey *Communication as Culture* (London Unwin Hyman, 1989)

33 Joshua Meyrowitz *No Sense of Place* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1985)

34 Ibid p 333

35 Ibid p 7

36 Ibid p 145

Much postmodern commentary repeats claims of this sort In order to make my task easier here, rather than attempting to deal, for example, with James Carey's carefully nuanced historical work on the mutual influence of communications technologies and social development,[32] I shall choose as an example of contemporary 'scenario-writing' Meyrowitz's fascinating (if overblown) analysis of the impact of electronic media on social behaviour, in transforming the 'situational geography of human life'.[33] Meyrowitz's concern is with the way in which electronic media have undermined the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation, to the extent that we are 'no longer "in" places in quite the same way'[34] as these media 'make us . . . audiences to performances that happen in other places and give us access to audiences who are not physically present' [35] Meyrowitz's central argument is that these new media redefine notions of social 'position' and 'place', divorcing experience from physical location In this way, these media, according to Meyrowitz, create new 'communities' across their spaces of transmission, bringing together otherwise disparate groups around the 'common experience' of television, in a process of cultural 'homogenization of here and there' [36] It is in this sense,

37 See Andrew Kirby, A sense of place', Critical Studies in Mass Communication, vol 6 no 3 (1989), p 323

38 Joshua Meyrowitz The generalized elsewhere', Critical Studies in Mass Communications vol 6, no 3 (1989), p 330

39 Jody Berland, 'Placing television', New Formations, no 4 (1988) p 147

40 B Wellman 'The community question' Journal of Sociology no 84 (1979) quoted in Meyrowitz, 'The generalized elsewhere

41 cf Morley Family Television
42 See Ruth Schwarz Cowan More Work for Mother (London Free Association Books 1989), Brenda Maddox 'Women and the switchboard , in I de Sola Pool (ed), The Social Impact of the Telephone (Boston MIT Press 1977), M Mayer The telephone and the uses of time', in de Sola Pool (ed), The Social Impact of the Telephone Linda Rakow, Gendered technology gendered practice Critical Studies in Mass Communications no 5 (1988) and her Women and the telephone , in Cheris Kramarae, Technology and Women s Voices (London Routledge 1988)
43 Eva Gamarnikow June Purvis et al (eds) The Public and the Private (London Heinemann, 1983)
44 Berland Placing television p 147

Meyrowitz argues, that the electronic media are destroying our sense of locality, so that 'places are increasingly like one another and . . . the singularity . and importance of . . locality is diminished'.[37] This may be to overstate the case, as Meyrowitz admits in his reply to Kirby, but, minimally, the function of these electronic media is certainly likely to 'relativize' our sense of place – so that 'locality is no longer necessarily seen as the centre stage of life's drama' [38] That centre stage is then, according to Meyrowitz, taken by national television in the home, bringing us news of the 'generalized elsewhere' of other places and 'non-local' people and their simultaneous experiences – thus undermining any sense of the primacy of 'locality' as the 'unifying rhetorical space of daily television extends into the living rooms of everyone'.[39]

As Meyrowitz notes, part of the point is that, for instance, access to non-local people (for instance, via the telephone) is nowadays often faster and simpler than access to physical neighbours. The 'community' is thus 'liberated from spatial locality' and many intimate ties are supported by the telephone rather than by face-to-face interaction (hence the telephone advertisement: 'Long distance is the next best thing to being there'). Thus, it seems, we should no longer conceive of community so much in terms of a local clustering of relationships but in terms of types of social relationship, whether local or distant – a 'psychological neighbourhood' or a 'personal community' as a network of (often non-local) ties.[40] Thus, 'community' is transformed: living physically near to others is no longer necessarily to be tied into mutually dependent communication systems; conversely, living far from others is no longer, necessarily, to be communicationally distant. Thus, it seems, locality is not simply subsumed in a national or global sphere, rather, it is increasingly bypassed in both directions: experience is both unified beyond localities and fragmented within them

Such fragmentation, however, is rarely random, nor is it a matter of merely individual differences or 'choices'.[41] Rather it is a question of the socially- and culturally-determined lines of division along which 'fragmentation' occurs Central among these lines is, of course, that of gender, and there is an increasing recognition of the 'gendering' of technologies such as the telephone, which is an effect of the socially organized positioning of gendered categories of persons across the public/private division [42] As Gamarnikow and Purvis note, the public/private split can, of course, itself be seen as a fundamental metaphor for the patterning of gender [43] 'Place' and 'placelessness' can certainly be seen to be (among other determinations) highly gendered experiences.

The vision of an 'emergent placelessness'[44] offered by many postmodern commentators can be criticized on a number of counts. Certainly, as Ferguson argues, the 'techno-orthodoxist' world view, which proclaims that satellite and other new ICTs have effectively

45 Ferguson 'Electronic media

reduced time–space differences to insignificance, is badly overstated.[45] Principally this is because the argument has little empirical grounding and operates at a level of over-abstraction which does not permit us to answer questions about *how* these media shift our everyday understandings of time and space, nor which media forms influence which people in which ways in their conceptualization of duration and distance [46] What is needed, in this respect, is 'qualitative research into how electronic communications magnify [or simply alter] time–space imperatives and which forms produce which kind of intended and unintended consequences' [47]

46 cf also Jennifer Bryce Family time and TV use in Tom Lindlof (ed) *Natural Audiences*

47 Ferguson Electronic media p 47

If television is not simply (in de Gaulle's phrase) the 'government in the sitting room' and if the homogenization of space and time in contemporary culture has not yet abolished all differences, still we must attend to the need to construct a properly postmodern geography of the relations between communications and power and the contemporary transformations of the public and private spheres. As Ferguson notes, despite the grand claims of the techno-orthodoxist 'homogenizers' it remains true that 'just as they have differential access to new and old communication media, so do different cultures, social groups and national sources of power perceive, categorize and prioritize temporal and spatial boundaries differently' [48] Rather than speculating, in the abstract, as to whether or not we are seeing the emergence of a unified 'European culture', under the impact of pan-European media, it may be more instructive to ask to what extent, for *which* groups (for example, teenage viewers of satellite television music channels, Eurobusinesspersons and so on) such a 'European' perspective is emerging [49]

48 Ibid p 153

49 See Richard Collins *Satellite television in Western Europe* (London John Libbey Books 1990)

Rather than presuming a uniform effect in which, from a crudely technologically-determinist perspective, new ICTs impose new sensibilities on peoples across the globe, it may be more realistic to conceive of them as overlaying the new upon the old Thus, a new technology such as the home computer may often be principally 'made sense of' via its integration into the very old 'technology' of the peer gossip network. Rather than the new media promoting a 'boundless media-land of common understandings' a variety of senses of 'temporal elasticity and local indeterminacy' may be the more likely result, where 'formerly finite absolutes take on a notably relativist character . and old certainties . . are undermined, to some extent by new ambiguities'.[50] This seems both a more realistic and a richer perspective from which to analyse the interaction of local definitions and larger communication systems As Miller argues in his analysis of the consumption of American soap opera in Trinidad, the 'local' is not to be considered as an indigenous source of cultural identity, which remains 'authentic' only in so far as it is

50 Ferguson Electronic media p 155

51 Daniel Miller 'The Young and the Restless in Trinidad a case of the local and the global in mass consumption' paper to Workshop on Domestic Consumption, Centre for Research in Innovation, Culture and Technology Brunel University May 1990

52 cf Dick Hebdige, Towards a cartography of taste', in his Hiding in the Light (London Comedia/Routledge 1988), and Ken Worpole Dockers and Detectives (London Verso, 1983), on the effects of 'foreign cultural artefacts in undermining the established hierarchies of national taste cultures but see also Kuan-Hsing Chen 'Postmarxism between/beyond critical postmodernism and cultural studies (Institute of Literature National Tsing-Hua University, Taiwan 1990) on the question of how the foreign so often comes to be represented by the American

53 Herbert Schiller 'The erosion of national sovereignty by the world business system in M Taber (ed), The Myth of the Information Revolution (London Sage, 1988)

54 Carey Communication as Culture, p 198

55 See Manuel Castells Crisis planning and the quality of life Society and Space vol 1, no 1 (1983)

56 See Peter Golding Political communication and citizenship, in Marjorie Ferguson (ed) Public Communication (London Sage 1989) and Graham Murdock 'Television and citizenship in Alan Tomlinson (ed) Consumption, Identity and Style (London Comedia/Routledge 1990)

unsullied by contact with the global Rather, the 'local' is itself often produced by means of the 'indigenization' of global resources and inputs.[51]

To the extent that imported television programmes penetrate local meaning systems, rather than thereby 'homogenizing' diverse cultures, their principal effect may be a quite variable one – in so far as they introduce a relativizing perspective, an 'uncertainty principle', which may work to undermine established and dominant frameworks of meaning in a variety of ways.[52]

Recalcitrant differences: the return of sociology

Against the grain of the 'homogenization' discourse there is a need to emphasize the fact that the much-celebrated 'participatory' choices and chances opened up by the new ICTs are far from evenly distributed as between nations and groups.[53] Carey refers bluntly to the distressing scenario opening up of a 'civic landscape increasingly divided into knowledgeable elites and ignorant masses'[54] Certainly, just as we see a widening gap between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor' countries on a global scale, the research available demonstrates, in the UK at least, that the use of the new ICTs is generally limited to the already wealthy and well-educated – who may well be establishing themselves in new dispersed (information-based) communities, while others are abandoned to rapidly degenerating localities.[55]

A number of commentators have pointed to the fact that, as the availability of television programmes comes to depend, to an increasing extent, on people's ability to pay for them, the airwaves can no longer be considered as a shared public resource. As the provision of information, education and entertainment passes into a 'regime of value' determined by the cash-nexus, television's contribution to 'a public culture' will increasingly be divided between the 'info-rich' and the 'info-poor' The much heralded 'wider choices' will be available only to those who can afford to pay for them. To the extent that access to public information and cultural resources comes to depend on the capacity of citizens to pay, so their capacity to participate effectively in the public realm will be correspondingly differentiated. Both Peter Golding and Graham Murdock have recently argued a similar case, focusing on the economic determinants of unequal access to information.[56]

As Golding puts it, commenting on the simple correlation of income levels with ownership of media hardware such as the telephone, video and computer:

Entrance to the new media playground is relatively cheap (as a percentage of total income) for the well-to-do – a small (and easy)

57 Golding *Political communication and citizenship* p 90

adjustment in spending patterns. Conversely, for the poor (and in the UK this is, of course, exacerbated by recent trends in income differentials) the price is a sharp calculation of opportunity cost – access to communication goods jostling uncomfortably with the mundane arithmetic of food, housing, clothing and fuel [57]

Any mechanism of communication that costs money to use will necessarily produce inequalities of access among social and economic groups – what we see here (according to Golding) is the potential for the dramatic emergence of forms of attenuated citizenship imposed by information-poverty, especially in relation to television, given its centrality in contemporary culture.

In my view, there is much to commend these arguments. The concept of the 'information gap' may be simplistic, but the scenario of economic poverty retarding the ability to acquire cultural resources, which itself then leads to further economic disadvantage, is an all too plausible one The problem lurking here though is perhaps the *overly* materialist nature of the model if it was *only* a question of financial limitations (rather than cultural ones) in the first place, then Bourdieu's work[58] on the class composition of attendance at 'free' museums would have been unnecessary, and the profile of users of similar 'free' or subsidized services (such as swimming pools, libraries, the health service and so on) would not be as skewed as it in fact is – in favour of the middle classes. The 'Information Gap' model may thus need to be redefined in more 'culturalist' terms than it has presently been formulated. Moreover, as is demonstrated by the number of home computers now lying unused under the stairs of houses throughout the UK, it is not simply a question of having the money to buy the hardware· in the case of computers, for those who did so, but did not already possess the requisite form of cultural capital to make their acquisitions 'work' for them, the purchase was often a disappointing and disillusioning experience In another sense it is not just a question of money as a determinant of access to entertainment resources either. Research on subsidized forms of local entertainment during the GLC period in London[59] demonstrated that it was, in fact, middle-class students who most took advantage of such subsidies For working-class audiences, with a culture of paying for 'a good night out', the cultural barriers debarring them from using these entertainment facilities (as manifested in cinema programming policy, decor, design and so on) were far more significant than the financial ones, except, of course, for the very poorest

In the context of the HICT research at Brunel, we confronted a situation where a variety of technologically determinist (and usually utopian) discourses (articulating 'technological innovation' to 'social progress')[60] dominated public debate, offering a variety of scenarios concerning 'technology' and its likely 'effects' in transforming both

58 Bourdieu, *Distinction*

59 Justin Lewis, David Morley and Russell Southwood *Art Who Needs It? – The Audience for the Community Arts* (London Comedia, 1986)

60 cf Slack 'Contextualising technology'

61 See also James Lull (ed) *World Families Watch TV* (London Sage 1989) for an international version of this argument

'society' and 'the family'. In the HICT study, our approach has been, to some extent, to invert this question and to pose a family's socio-economic position, household structure and culture as independent variables, which can then be analysed in terms of their 'effects' in determining both the perception of the salience of various technologies and their differential rates of 'take up' and modes of usage, within families of various types.[61]

Technologies have to be understood as being incorporated into the pre-existing rules of the household for the allocation of space, time and tasks, especially with respect to gender. To this extent Bourdieu's classic analysis of the gendering of space within the traditional Berber household[62] continues to offer an extremely helpful model for understanding how and why different technologies become 'gendered' in particular ways, and how this process itself then structures the dynamics of consumption and technology-use.[63]

62 Pierre Bourdieu, The Berber house', in Mary Douglas (ed) *Rules and Meanings* (Harmondsworth Penguin 1972)

63 cf *inter alia* Cynthia Cockburn *Machineries of Dominance Men, Women and Technical Know-How* (London Pluto Press 1985) Ann Gray, Women and video', in Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer (eds) *Boxed In Women in and on Television* (London Routledge 1989) Shelley Turkle 'Computational reticence why women fear the intimate machine', in Kramarae (ed) *Technology and Women's Voices*

From the sitting room to the (inter)nation(al)

I want now to narrow the focus of my argument once more, by concentrating particularly on television and other broadcast media, as opposed to the full range of information and communication technologies and, at the same time, to return directly to the question with which I began, concerning the relation of micro- and macro-analyses and the status of small-scale ethnographic studies of media consumption in the analysis of macro-issues of power and politics.[64]

64 cf Ien Ang, 'Culture and Communication towards an ethnographic critique of media consumption in the transnational media system' *European Journal of Communication*, vol 5, nos 2-3 (1990)

In recent years, one line of criticism of researchers such as Lull, Silverstone and myself has been that, in our concern with the domestic context of television viewing, we were busy conducting an ill-considered (if not hasty) 'retreat' into the private realm of the sitting room, and away from the important public issues of power, politics and policy which constitute the proper subjects of the study of communication. I shall argue that this critique is misguided, on a number of counts It is not only that the average sitting room (in my experience) is the site of some very important political conflicts – it is, among other things, one of the principal sites of the politics of gender and age – but is also that, in my view, the sitting room is exactly where we need to start from if we finally want to understand the constitutive dynamics of abstractions such as 'the community' or 'the nation'. This is especially so if we are concerned with the role of communications in the continuous formation, sustenance, recreation and transformation of these entities The central point precisely concerns television's role in connecting, for example, the 'familiar' or domestic and the national and international spheres, and in sustaining both the image and the reality of the 'national family', and of various trans-national 'communities' [65]

65 cf Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley, *Everyday Television Nationwide* (London BFI 1978) particularly ch 4 see also Paddy Scannell, 'Radio Times in Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television and its Audience* (London BFI 1988), Simon Frith, The pleasures of the hearth' in James Donald (ed), *Formations of Pleasure* (London Routledge 1983) David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, Broadcasting and national unity', in James Curran (ed) *Impacts and Influences* (London Methuen 1983)

66 cf John Hartley 'Textual practice', Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London Verso, 1985), Jesus Martin-Barbero, 'Communications from culture', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 10, no 4 (1988) Roger Silverstone 'Television, myth and culture', in James Carey (ed), *Media, Myths and Narratives* (London Sage 1988)

67 David Chaney, 'The symbolic form of ritual in mass communication', in P Golding (ed), *Communicating Politics* (Leicester Leicester University Press 1986)

68 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz 'Performing media events', in Curran et al (eds) *Impacts and Influences*

69 J Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1976)

70 See Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London Routledge 1991), for a thorough critique of the television industry's technologies for constructing its 'knowledge of its audiences

From this perspective, one of the key functions of broadcasting is the creation of a bridge between the public and the private, the sacred and the profane, the extraordinary and the mundane.[66] Thus Chaney analyses the role of broadcasting in enabling the public to participate in the collective life of the nation As Chaney points out, a 'nation' is a very abstract collectivity in so far as it is too big to be experienced directly by the individual.[67] To that extent, the 'we-feeling' of community has to be continually engendered by opportunities for identification, as the sense of 'nation' is manufactured Chaney is particularly concerned with the role of mass media in relaying civil rituals (coronations, royal weddings and so on). It is this 'interfacing' of the public and the private which concerns us here. On the one hand, the audience for such national events is usually atomized, either attending individually or in small groups such as the family or peer group. On the other hand, each such group sits in front of a television set emitting the same representations of this 'central' event· the 'public' is thus experienced in the private (domestic) realm; it is 'domesticated' But at the same time the 'private' itself is thus transformed or 'socialized'. The space (and experience) created is *neither* public *nor* private in their traditional senses

In unravelling these connections, the work of Dayan and Katz[68] on the representation of the Royal Wedding of 1981 on British television may be of some help. Drawing on Austin's theory of 'performative' speech acts,[69] Katz and Dayan are concerned to analyse television's role in constructing (literally 'performing') media events, such as the Royal Wedding. In this connection, they argue, television should not be seen as 'representing' the event so much as constructing the experience of it for the majority of the population Television, they argue, is not so much reporting on the event but actively involved in 'performing' it Television is not simply transmitting such an event (or commenting on it) but is bringing it into existence.

The question Dayan and Katz pose is what happens to such ceremonies when, instead of being attended in person, they are delivered to us at home As they note, being physically distanced from the ceremonial forms and isolated from each other, television audiences do not form 'masses' or 'crowds' except in an abstract, statistical sense [70] The question they pose is that of whether we can still speak of a public event, when it is celebrated at home – and whether we can speak of a collective celebration when the collectivity is scattered As they note, under these conditions:

> The very hugeness of the audiences had paradoxically transposed the celebration into an intimate register Ceremonial space has been reconstituted, but in the home Attendance takes place in small groups congregated around the television set, concentrating

71 Dayan and Katz 'Performing media events', p 194

72 Ibid p 195

73 For the debates on popular memory and the national past' see Patrick Wright On Living in an Old Country (London Verso 1985), for a contemporary application of these arguments in the context of German reunification, see the comments of the German historian, Michael Sturmer 'in a land without history, he wins the future who provides the memory, frames the concepts and interprets the past (quoted in The Guardian, 28 September 90)

74 Jonathon Rutherford (ed) Identity Community Culture Difference (London Lawrence & Wishart 1990)

75 Homi Bhabha (ed), Nation and Narration (London Routledge 1990)

76 Claus Dieter Rath 'The invisible network television in everyday life in Philip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds) Television in Transition (London BFI 1985)

77 Marie Gillespie 'Technology and tradition in Cultural Studies vol 3 no 2 (1989)

on the symbolic centre, keenly aware that myriads of other groups are doing likewise, in a similar manner, and at the same time.[71]

The analogy which Dayan and Katz offer is that of the Jewish Passover 'Seder' ritual – a collective ceremony without a central 'cultic temple', which translates the public celebration into 'a multiplicity of simultaneous, similarly-programmed, home-bound, micro-events'.[72] Thus, Dayan and Katz imply, the television audience, as a dispersed community, can usefully be seen as being regularly united (both by its occasional viewing of special events or by its regular viewing of the 'news' or favourite soap operas) by means of precisely this kind of 'diasporic ceremony'. While 'media events' (such as a televised Royal Wedding) clearly constitute a special case in which this issue is brought into particular prominence, the model can clearly be extended to the quotidian level, so that the regular viewing of the nightly television news (or of a long-running soap opera) can be seen in the same light – as discourses which constitute collectivities through a sense of 'participation' and through the production of both a simultaneity of experience and a sense of a 'past in common' [73]

The point is increasingly well taken, as demonstrated by the essays collected in Rutherford[74] and Bhabha,[75] the latter directly addressing the question of the relationship between 'nation' and 'narration' and focusing on the 'performativity' of language and discourse, in constructing the narratives of national and cultural identities. Clearly, the point applies at both micro- and macro-levels – just as we should then be concerned with the role of communications technologies in the constitution of national identity, so with the analysis of the implication of these technologies in the construction of identities at the domestic level.

One of the critical issues, as argued earlier, concerns the relationship between community and geography when, as Rath puts it, we increasingly live in a 'television-geography' where the invisible 'electronic networks' defined by spaces of transmission (and distribution) cut across established geographical boundaries [76] By way of indication of some of the issues involved in developing this work further we can also usefully refer to the work of Gillespie,[77] who offers an insightful analysis of the role played by the video recorder in the negotiation of ethnic identities among Asians in Britain (who utilize the video to arrange regular showings of Indian films and similar material unavailable on broadcast television in Britain – a practice which can be found among immigrant groups in other European countries). In this way, new communications technologies are mobilized in the (re)creation and maintenance of traditions, cultural and ethnic identities which transcend any easy equation of geography, place and culture, creating symbolic networks throughout the various communities of the diaspora The

78 Stuart Hall 'New ethnicities' in Kobena Mercer (ed) *Black Film British Cinema* (London Institute of Contemporary Arts 1988)

79 Ulf Hannerz 'Cosmopolitans and locals in world culture' in Mike Featherstone (ed) *Global Culture* (London Sage 1990)

point here is that such groups have, thus far, usually appeared in the research frame on the understanding that theirs is a particularly problematic position – as 'immigrants' In this respect Hall[78] usefully reminds us of the increasing centrality of the 'migrant' experience throughout contemporary culture, even if we might still want to distinguish between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary cosmopolitans'.[79]

If the traditional equation of community with geographical boundary and physical place is something which we simply have to ditch if we are to understand contemporary culture and communications, this is not to say that these terms will have no effective relation – simply that it is increasingly misleading to reduce the former to either of the latter As long ago as 1933 the art historian and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim foresaw the social consequences of television as a means of distribution as meaning that

80 Quoted in Rath *The invisible network* p 199

> it renders the object on display independent of its point of origin, makes it unnecessary for spectators to flock together in front of an 'original' . it takes the place of other means of distribution
> Thus television turns out to be related to the motor car and the aeroplane – as a means of transport for the mind.[80]

As I said in the beginning, I am finally interested in articulating the analyses of micro- and macro-processes in relation to the simultaneous processes of homogenization and fragmentation, globalization and localization in contemporary culture Certainly, as we enter the era of narrowcasting and audience segmentation it may well be that less of us will have less broadcast 'experience' in common with anyone else – and anyway video allows us both to time-shift broadcast materials so as to consume them at times that fit our 'private' schedules, and to consume non-broadcast materials – so the model of a 'necessary simultaneity' of shared social experience, provided by broadcasting, becomes problematic However, at the same time, new developments in broadcasting (whether the occasional Global Totemic Festivals of the 'Live Aid' variety or the regular construction of a European-wide youth audience for music programming) begin to combine us into not just national but international collectivities, especially as the supply of programmes to national broadcasting systems is increasingly dominated by a small number of transnational corporations. But then, as Coca Cola put it 'we are not a multi-national, we are a multi-local' [81]

81 See Duncan Webster 'Cocacolonisation and national cultures *Overhere* vol 9 no 2 (1989) and Kevin Robins 'Re-imagined communities', *Cultural Studies* vol 3 no 2 (1989)

What is required, in this context, is an approach which can deal both with the global–local dynamic of these cultural processes at a substantive level, and with the need to articulate the micro- and macro-dimensions. so as to integrate more effectively our analyses of the domestic, the local, the national and the international aspects of communications

Jameson's Complaint: video-art and the intertextual 'time-wall'

NICHOLAS ZURBRUGG

All right, B.J cut. From now on we run a good clean show. A show you can take your kids and your grandmother to see it Just good clean magic for all the family.

1 William S Burroughs, 'St Louis return', *The Paris Review*, no 35 (1965) p 57

As William Burroughs intimates in the lines above from 'St Louis Return',[1] cinema and video seldom simply offer innocuous 'good clean magic for all the family'. Like any other genre, video displays an array of effects, ranging from the good, the bad and the ugly to the downright nasty. Unlike older genres, video also challenges our cultural expectations. First, as Walter Benjamin might have argued, it realizes Modernism's vague aspirations toward 'effects which could only be obtained by a changed technical standard'.[2] Video *is* this sort of changed technical standard. Second, as a specifically postmodern practice interacting with other genres, video precipitates an increasingly prevalent 'multi-media' sensibility.

2 Walter Benjamin 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans Harry Zohn (Glasgow Collins, 1979), p 239

Arguably, the most compelling examples of distinctively *post-Modern* creativity emerge within video-art and its multi-media corollaries Any understanding of contemporary art necessitates the critical examination of video's taped authorial works and its more impersonal installations, and of new modes of multi-media performance combining live and technological performance, or reconceptualizing traditional theatre in terms of video's special qualities and effects.

Ironically, as Umberto Eco points out in his articles on the new media, those 'trained by the texts of twenty years ago' often seem quite helpless before multi-media art By contrast, younger generations born within the welter of the new media 'instinctively know these things better than some seventy-year-old pedagogue', having 'absorbed as elements of their behaviour a series

3 Umberto Eco, 'The multiplication
of the media (1983) and A
photograph (1977) in *Travels in
Hyperreality* trans William
Weaver (London Picador 1987)
pp 149 147 and 214–15

4 Charles Jencks *Post-Modernism
The New Classicism in Art and
Architecture* (London Academy
Editions, 1987), p 12

5 Ibid p 20

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*
(Paris Bernard Grasset 1986), p
74 my translation

7 Jean Baudrillard interviewed by
Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Eyeline*
(Brisbane) no 11 (1990) p 6

8 Fredric Jameson interviewed by
Anders Stephanson, *Flash Art*
international edition no 131
(1986/7) p 72

9 Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism
and utopia* in *Utopia Post
Utopia Configurations of Nature
and Culture and Recent
Sculpture and Photography*
(Boston The Institute of
Contemporary Art Boston 1988)
p 18

of elements filtered through the mass media (and coming, in some cases, from the most impenetrable areas of our century's artistic experimentation).'[3]

At its most positive extreme, postmodern creativity exhibits identical virtues. Absorbing and internalizing the lessons of Modernism's most impenetrable experimentation, and at the same time mastering the more 'impenetrable' advances in late twentieth-century technology, postmodern video-artists such as Nam June Paik and postmodern multi-media artists such as Robert Wilson create the quintessentially late twentieth-century art that conservative critics such as Charles Jencks have incredulously characterized as that 'strange even paradoxical thing': an art 'more modern than Modern', and 'more avant-garde' than the Modernist avant garde.[4]

At its most misleading extreme, the postmodern cultural theory of critics such as Jencks and Fredric Jameson dismisses contemporary technological creativity in far more negative terms. Postmodern culture, it seems, coincides with the 'deaths' of authoriality, originality, spirituality, monumentality, beauty, profoundity – everything, in fact, except apocalyptic cliche. According to Jencks, for example, postmodern culture subverts the ideals of the Modernist tradition in 'a series of self-cancelling steps'; reduces art and music to the 'all white canvas' and 'absolute silence'; and transforms its public into 'lobotomized mass-media illiterates'.[5]

Jencks's concept of the 'mass-media illiterate' has an unexpected double-edge. On the one hand, it obviously refers to those nurtured on televised kitsch, incapable of reading anything more challenging than comic-book captions But as recent discussions of postmodern video-art suggest, the same formulation also applies to theorists nurtured on the printed page: those who vaguely sense the significance of video-art, but who find themselves incapable of deliberating upon it in anything other than derisive terminology Jean Baudrillard, for example, hails video as 'the special effect of our time', but in the next breath rather ambiguously applauds and deplores video for its 'intensity on the surface' and its 'insignificance in depth'.[6] More recently, Baudrillard has evoked video as 'a foreign domain' in which he wants 'to remain a foreigner' [7]

In much the same way, Fredric Jameson emphasizes the significance of video, and half-heartedly acknowledges that video-artists such as Nam June Paik have 'identified a whole range of things to do and then moved in to colonize this new space' [8] Thereafter, Jameson alludes rather uncertainly to Paik's 'quintessentially postmodern dispositions', and adds the scathing afterthought, 'only the most misguided museum visitor would look for "art" in the content of the video images themselves'.[9]

Surely the reverse obtains Only the most misguided or the most cynical viewer would suppose that Paik's work consists solely of discursive self-referentiality Briefly, Jameson's deliberations upon

postmodern video-art, and upon postmodern culture in general, project their own conceptual confusion upon such subject matter. Jameson appears the victim of two afflictions: his tendency toward premature exasperation, and his more general disadvantage as one of the many contemporary intellectuals who appear trapped behind what one might think of as the intertextual 'time-wall'.

These complaints become most explicit in Jameson's recent article entitled 'Reading without interpretation postmodernism and the video-text' (1987),[10] an essay continually informed by over-literal responses to Roland Barthes's provocative overstatements in 'The Death of the Author' (1968).[11] Parisian polemic has long perfected exaggeration and heuristic hyperbole into something of an art form; a tradition which culminates in Baudrillard's seductive 'fictionizing'[12] One thinks, for example, of the impossible, inflexible imperatives of Surrealists such as Luis Buñuel or André Breton. Declaring that 'NOTHING' in his film *Un Chien andalou* 'SYMBOLISES ANYTHING', Buñuel explains that this work's scenario evolved according to strict adherence to principles determining that,

> When an image or idea appeared the collaborators discarded it immediately if it was derived from remembrance, or from their cultural pattern or if, simply, it had a conscious association with another earlier idea. They accepted only those representations as valid which, though they moved them profoundly, had no possible explanation[13]

As Buñuel indicates, his fidelity to the articles of Surrealism proved supremely impractical. Faced with the possibility that the supposedly subversive *Un Chien andalou* might become a public success, and confronted by Breton's astonishing question: 'are you with the police or with us?', Buñuel 'suggested that we burn the negative on the *place du Tetre* in Montmartre, something I would have done without hesitation had the group agreed to it'.[14] Jameson's pursuit of Barthes's early ideals leads to much the same kind of self-destructive logic as that born of Buñuel's dedication to Breton's edicts.

Buñuel's and Jameson's conclusions offer a pleasing asymmetry While the former defend authorial insight and scorn cultural convention, the latter reassert Barthes's claim that texts contain no other content that a 'performative' function According to 'The Death of the Author':

> The fact is   that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction'   . rather, it designates exactly what linguists   . call a performative . . in which the enunciation has no other content   . than the act by which it is uttered. (pp 145–6)

10 Fredric Jameson, Reading without interpretation postmodernism and the video-text in Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant and Colin MacCabe (eds) *The Linguistics of Writing Arguments Between Language and Literature* (Manchester Manchester University Press, 1987) All references to this essay appear henceforth as unattributed page numbers in my text

11 Roland Barthes, The Death of the Author trans Stephen Heath in *Image Music-Text* (Glasgow Collins, 1977) pp 142–8 Where appropriate, all subsequent references to this essay appear in my text

12 Jean Baudrillard *L Amérique comme fiction*, interview with Jacques Henric and Guy Scaparta, *Art Press* (Paris) no 103 (1986) p 41, my translation in *Eyeline* (Brisbane) no 5 (1988) p 24

13 Luis Buñuel *My Last Sigh*, trans Abigail Israel (New York Alfred A Knopf 1983) pp 108 and 110

14 Luis Buñuel, 'Notes on the making of *Un Chien andalou* in Joan Mellen (ed) *The World of Luis Buñuel* (New York Oxford University Press 1978) p 153

Taken to its extreme, Barthes's argument proposes:

> In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*, the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking), at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath. (p 147)

Jameson takes this hypothesis very seriously Recycling it some twenty years after its initial formulation, he applies it once again both to the 'postmodern text' in general, and to video in particular (taking video to be a 'privileged exemplar' of postmodernism's products), observing that they may be defined as,

> a structure or sign-flow which resists meaning, whose fundamental inner logic is the exclusion of themes   . and which therefore systematically sets out to shortcircuit traditional interpretive temptations. (p. 219)

In much the same way, Baudrillard sweepingly dismisses the referential potential of the electronic media, arguing that the screen 'only communicates images, not a particular time and place', so that,

> In the end it makes everything circulate in one space, without depth, where all the objects must be able to follow one after the other without slowing down or stopping the circuit.[15]

One reads Jameson's account of video's 'exclusion of themes' with considerable nostalgia In almost identical terms, Barthes's early essay on the *nouveau roman* 'Objective literature' (1954) insisted that Robbe-Grillet's novels were 'not composed in depth', did not 'protect a heart' beneath their surface; and contained 'no thematics'.[16] Rather, they apparently 'assassinate the classical object' in a 'well-planned murder' which 'cuts them off from . . the poet's privileged terrain' [17] It is scarcely surprising that Robbe-Grillet subsequently disassociated his work from Barthes's oversimplistic exegesis [18] Nor indeed is one startled by Barthes's shift of focus from 'studium' (or anonymous, general codes), to 'punctum' (or idiosyncratic, personal responses), in both his essays on photography in *Camera Lucida* (1980),[19] and such diary entries as the following observations of 5 August 1977

> Continuing *War and Peace*, I have a violent emotion, reading the death of old Prince Bolkonsky, his last words of tenderness to his daughter .   Literature has an effect of truth much more violent for me than that of religion [20]

Jameson perceives little 'truth' and 'violent emotion'. Having declared video to be 'a sign-flow which resists meaning', he makes the extraordinary suggestion.

15 Jean Baudrillard, untitled interview from the French *La Sept* television channel programme *l'objet d art a l âge electronique* (8 May 1987), translated by Lucy Forsyth *Block* no 14 (1988) p 9

16 Roland Barthes Objective literature , trans Richard Howard in *Critical Essays* (Evanston Northwestern University Press 1972) pp 14 and 16

17 Ibid , pp 16–17

18 Robbe-Grillet dismisses Barthes's conclusions as a simplification of his work, 'Confessions of a voyeur interview with Roland Caputo, *Tension* (Victoria) (September–October 1986) pp 10–11

19 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans Richard Howard (New York Hill and Wang, 1981) pp 22–7

20 Roland Barthes Deliberation in *The Rustle of Language*, trans Richard Howard (New York Hill and Wang 1986) pp 366–7

Whatever a good, let alone a great videotext might be, it will be bad or flawed whenever . . interpretation proves possible, whenever the text slackly opens up . places and areas of thematization. (p. 219)

Jameson appears to generate this strange definition of video by combining Barthes's theories of intertextuality with a number of concepts and metaphors borrowed from the writings of Raymond Williams and Jean Baudrillard. His hypothesis that video becomes 'flawed' whenever it permits thematic interpretation stems from Williams' suggestion that television evinces 'a situation of total flow . streaming before us all day long without interruption'. (p. 202) Applying this concept of 'total flow' to video, Jameson argues that video-art should *only* exist and should *only* be apprehended as a vague, uninterrupted flow of superficial fragments. Accordingly, he concludes:

Video-viewing . . involves immersion in the total flow of the thing itself, preferably a kind of random succession of three or four hours of tape at regular intervals . . *What is quite out of the question is to look at a single 'video work' all by itself* (p 208)[21]

The reasons for Jameson's hostility to the acknowledgement of the single work of video-art rapidly become evident. So far as he is concerned postmodern culture demarcates – or *ought* to demarcate – a cultural revolution or terror eliminating all traces of original creativity. Rejecting both the rhetoric and the reality of cultural innovation, and refusing even to contemplate individual video-works, Jameson warns the viewer:

To select – even as an 'example' – a single video text, and to discuss it in isolation, is fatally to regenerate the illusion of the masterpiece or the canonical text. (p 208)

This morbid fear of masterpieces coexists with Jameson's suspicion that the postmodern revolution may not yet have exterminated *all* traces of the modernist aesthetic Rephrasing the warning in the lines above, he cautions·

The discussion, the indispensable preliminary selection and isolation, of a single 'text' . automatically transforms it back into a 'work', turns the anonymous videomaker back into a named artist or 'auteur', *opens the way for the return of all those features of an older modernist aesthetic which it was in the revolutionary nature of the newer medium to have precisely effaced and dispelled.* (p. 209)[22]

There is no special reason why the new postmodern media should by its very 'revolutionary nature' *efface* the modernist aesthetic. As John Cage remarks, 'Machines . can tend toward our stupefaction

23 John Cage letter to Paul Henry
Lang (22 May 1956) in Richard
Kostelanetz (ed) *John Cage*
(London Allen Lane, 1971) p
118

24 Alexei Gan, Constructivism ,
trans John Bowlt in Stephen
Bann (ed) *The Tradition of
Constructivism* (London Thames
and Hudson, 1974) pp 35–6

25 Barthes The Death of the
Author', p 147

26 Jean Baudrillard, Requiem for
the media trans Charles Levin
in John G Hanhardt (ed) *Video
Culture A Critical Investigation*
(New York Gibbs M Smith Inc ,
1987), p 128

or our enlivenment'.[23] Revolutionary aesthetics have always posited an oppositional relationship between the present and the past, but in Jameson's case, revolutionary practices are taken as evidence not only of the 'effacement' of the past, but – by deft movements of retrospective redefinition – as proof that the past never really existed save in terms of present, revolutionary arguments. Thus, whereas the Russian Constructivist, Alexei Gan, writing in 1922, entertained the distinction between modernist 'industrial culture' and pre-modernist art, 'indissolubly linked with theology, metaphysics and mysticism' which 'arose naturally, developed naturally and disappeared naturally',[24] Jameson denies even this 'natural' contrast. Apparently there never were, never are and never could be any positive alternatives to what Jameson identifies as 'mediated' culture informed by the 'deep underlying materiality of all things' (p. 199)

Jameson's hypotheses pivot upon the questionable assumption that the postmodern age coincides with 'the extinction of the sacred and the "spiritual" ' (p. 199) Dominated by Jameson's alternative to the deep underlying spirituality of all things – the deep underlying materiality of all things – the present appears to be a time when 'there are no more masterpieces, no more great books', and 'even the concept of good books has become problematical'. (p. 208) Adding what one might think of as retrospective insult to contemporary injury, Jameson adds that culture 'always *was* material'. From this it would appear to follow that 'older forms or genres' and 'older spiritual exercises and meditations . . were also in their different ways media products' (p 199) Viewed with Jamesonian hindsight, all cultural practices become redefined as 'material' and as 'mediated' products. *Everything*, it seems, is material, in its own way.

At this point, Jameson equates the 'material' with the 'textual' Reaffirming Roland Barthes's argument that everything is 'intertextual', in its own way, he advises the reader·

> Everything can now be a text . . while objects that were formerly 'works' can now be reread as immense ensembles or systems of texts of various kinds, superimposed on each other by way of the various intertextualities, successions of fragments, or yet again, sheer process (henceforth called textual production or textualization). (p. 208)

Barthes, of course, argued that this sort of 'textualization' could at least be 'followed' and 'disentangled', if not 'deciphered'.[25] Unwilling, it seems, even to credit postmodern video-art with this kind of tangible coherence, Jameson turns for inspiration to Baudrillard's apocalyptic assertion that 'The mass-media are anti-mediatory and   fabricate non-communication' [26] Reconceptualized in such rhetoric, postmodern video's 'non-communication' appears to evince a 'logic of rotating conjunction and disjunction' (p 221) resisting both thematic analysis and

sustained structural investigation. At best, the viewer simply perceives vacuous 'good clean magic', or:

> a ceaseless rotation of elements such that they change place at every moment, with the result that no single element can occupy the position of 'interpretant' (or that of primary sign) for any length of time (p 218)

Taking up another of Baudrillard's provocative phrases – his suggestion that the postmodern era witnesses 'the dissolution of life into T V'[27] – Jameson asserts that video somehow 'dissolves' both its viewer's and its author's sense of identity and subjectivity. Introducing this insight with reference to intuitions born of his own dissolving subjectivity, he confides:

> I have the feeling that mechanical depersonalization (or decentring the subject) goes even further in the new medium, where auteurs themselves are dissolved along with the spectator (p. 205)

This sweeping feeling derives from extremely general meditation, rather than from selective study of specific examples of his subject matter. The weakest trends in postmodern culture – be these modes of video-art or modes of poststructuralist theory – certainly drift into vacuous 'rotating conjunction and disjunction', dissolving both their author's presence and their audience's patience. It is to such 'degraded' (p 210) material that Jameson turns his attention.

Apart from his sporadic asides to the 'unimaginable informational garbage' polluting the media-works of the 'new media society' (p. 210), Jameson considers only one specific video composition: 'a twenty-nine minute "work" entitled *AlienNATION* (1988), produced at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago' (p 209), and only one specific multi-media performance: Laurie Anderson's *USA* (which also contains the word 'alienation'). Persuaded that neither work deploys or distinguishes the implications of the former's 'obliging title', particularly when compared with the rigour of Marx's 'Early manuscripts' (p. 217), Jameson dismisses the thematic potential of both video-art and multi-media performance-art in the supremely subjective speculation

> one has the deeper feeling that 'texts' like *USA* or *AlienNATION* ought not to have any 'meaning' at all, in that thematic sense (pp 217–18)

This is surely one of Jameson's most ill-considered speculations, especially when one reflects that he is claiming to discuss postmodern video 'in its strongest and most original and most authentic form'. (p. 223) One scarcely expects the logic of video and multi-media performance to replicate that of Marx's 'Early manuscripts'. But one might well expect Jameson to substantiate his

'deeper feelings' with more careful reference to these new arts. This is not to be. At best, he rather languidly delegates detailed research to the reader (despite his repeated prohibition of precisely this kind of specific study and 'self-observation'), concluding

> This is something everyone is free to verify, by self-observation and a little closer attention to those moments in which we briefly feel that disillusionment I have described experiencing at the thematically explicit moments in *USA*. (p. 218)

Jameson belatedly – and somewhat ineffectively – acknowledges the confusion and contradiction in his argument, when he concedes that he is the victim of 'the hegemony of theories of textuality and textualization'; a set of presuppositions that he finally criticizes as a 'vicious circle' or 'double bind'. (p 221) Despite this insight, Jameson placidly acquiesces to these theories, insofar as he observes· 'your entry ticket to the public sphere in which these matters are debated is an agreement, tacit or otherwise, with the basic presuppositions of a general problem-field' (p 221)

Jean-François Lyotard rather more convincingly posits that critics and artists should think and create more independently, by 'working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done'.[28] On occasion, Jameson likewise aspires to define video 'afresh .. without imported and extrapolated categories'. (p. 201) As he remarks to Anders Stephanson, his hypotheses approximate most closely to Lyotard's ideal when they work with 'allegories', inventing what one might think of as fictional systems and landmarks in order to encompass 'what will have been done'·

> In trying to theorize the systematic, I was using certain of these things as allegories. From this angle it makes no sense trying to look for individual trends, and individual artists are only interesting if one finds some moment where the system as a whole, or some limit of it, is being touched [29]

Jameson's allegories display two fundamental weaknesses First, they depend upon reductive intertextual theory. Second, they consistently neglect those crucial 'individual' artists and trends which most clearly exemplify 'what will have been done' As Jameson admits in his recent essay on 'Postmodernism and utopia' (1988), his overly systematic allegories and paradigms take no account of artists such as Hans Haacke, whose work he acclaims as:

> a kind of cultural production which is clearly postmodern and equally clearly political and oppositional – something that does not compute with the paradigm and does not seem to have been theoretically foreseen by it.[30]

As becomes increasingly evident, Jameson's accounts of postmodern video and postmodern multi-media performance leave

28 Jean-François Lyotard, Answering the question what is postmodernism?', trans Regis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition A Report on Knowledge*, trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester Manchester University Press 1984) p 81

29 Jameson interview with Anders Stephanson, p 72

30 Jameson Postmodernism and utopia , p 16

far too much *unforeseen* – and far too much *unseen*. While Jameson modestly prefaces the following account of his responses to Rauschenberg's work with the confession: 'I don't know how great Rauschenberg is', his subsequent comments reveal the way in which his impatience before unfamiliar postmodern art leads him to dismiss it almost by very definition as inconsequential, sub-monumental, and so on. In this respect, one might respond that Jameson *always* seems to have 'known' that Rauschenberg's work could never be 'great', since by very Jamesonian definition, it resists prolonged examination and profound meditation, instantly becoming out of mind when out of sight. Rapidly transforming tentative confusion into dogmatic delusion, Jameson relates:

> I saw a wonderful show of his in China, a glittering set of things which offered all kinds of postmodern experiences But when they're over, they're over The textual object is not, in other words, a work of art, a 'masterwork' like the Modernist monument was. You go into a Rauschenberg show and experience a process done in very expert and inventive ways, and when you leave, it's over.[31]

Jameson's argument seems trapped within its own momentum Given the historical, technological and aesthetic character of postmodernism, one would scarcely expect it to produce 'masterworks' which were *literally* 'like the Modernist monument'. Nevertheless, it seems injudiciously impetuous to infer that Postmodern culture is axiomatically sub-monumental simply because it – quite predictably – offers alternatives to Modernism's monuments The social, technological and aesthetic problems of our time are substantially different to those of the twenties, and it is to artistic responses to these recent problems – be they monumental or otherwise – that the cultural critic should turn.

As John G Handhart remarks, the most interesting works of video-art offer striking ripostes to the supposedly neutralizing impact of television and video Commenting upon the work of Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik, Handhart suggests that

> The achievements of Paik and Vostell, both independently and collaboratively, were to strip television of its institutional meanings and expose its manipulation of images as a powerful co-optive force in capitalist society.[32]

In this respect, Paik and Vostell are notable for their subversive inter-active aesthetic In Handhart's terms, 'By alerting us to how we look at television, Paik and Vostell proclaimed the possibility of changing this relationship from a passive to an active one'.[33] Marita Sturken makes very much the same observation Emphasizing the way in which 'Paik combined the destruction of TV's popular image

31 Jameson interview with Anders Stephanson p 72

32 John G Handhardt 'Video in fluxus *Art and Text* no 37 (1990), p 86

33 Ibid, p 91

with clever interpretations of video's role in the communications future and a reinterpretation of the role of the viewer', Sturken adds,

> Many of his TV sculptures are intended to involve the viewers and to question their passive role . . . by using their voices or images as visual material [34]

34 Marita Sturken 'Video in the United States' in Rene Payant (ed) *Video* (Montreal Artextes 1986), p 57

Other works such as Paik's *Beuys' Voice* – quite literally, a monumental installation shown in different versions at *Documenta 8*, at Paik's Hayward retrospective *Video Works 1963–88* (where it deployed fifty-five television sets), at the 1990 Sydney Biennale and at the Fluxus segment of the 1990 Venice Biennale – employ the more personal, biographical materials that Jameson deems incompatible with video art Based upon footage of one of Paik's last performances with Beuys, *Beuys' Voice* is at once an orchestration of the 'grain' of Beuys' voice and a celebration of Paik's admiration and reverence for a late friend and collaborator

At first, *Beuys' Voice* seems an extremely confusing work Then, as the eye settles, one becomes aware of its two basic sections. a central set of screens displaying sections and sub-sections of footage of Beuys' performance, and two end-sections, consisting of screens framing more rapid sequences of more abstract and distorted imagery Paik remarks that his more recent piece, *Living with the Living Theater* (1989), similarly combines sequences of relatively legible, slow footage with more demanding, more accelerated imagery. Contemplating successive variants of *Beuys' Voice* in Kassel, London, Sydney and Venice, one gradually becomes aware of the respective felicities of its different incarnations, and begins to evaluate and compare the 'art' and content of Paik's video images (despite Jameson's injunction that only the most misguided viewer might attempt this exercise) Likewise, the more one sees of other artists' video installations, the easier it becomes to assess Paik's contributions to this genre

There would appear good reasons for citing Paik's *Beuys' Voice* as an archetypal postmodern multi-media monument. Movingly combining a variety of more or less legible visual and sonic narratives, ranging from footage of Beuys to more abstract fragmentation, Paik dynamically demonstrates the surprisingly positive potential of the multi-screened video installation All the same, it is a slow, laborious process, coming to terms with his unfamiliar endeavours As Paik perspicaciously intimates in an early manifesto entitled 'Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television 1963, March, Galerie Parnass', his work demands considerable attention and contemplation, hence his final suggestion, 'Anyway, if you see my TV, please, see it more than thirty minutes' [35]

35 Nam June Paik, Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television 1963, March Galerie Parnass in Achille Bonito Oliva (ed) *Ubi Fluxus ibi Motus 1990–1962* (Milano Mazzotta 1990) p 387

New video requires at least partial contemplation in its own terms,

rather than those of other more familiar prior discourse. As John Cage suggests, innovative art increases our awareness of the unknown, as much as of the known – possibilities which one can only apprehend slowly, in time, rather than instantaneously, within the categories of the past. Whereas Jameson dismisses and deplores Rauschenberg's experiments with the aside 'when you leave, it's over', Cage rather more generously ponders upon his discovery of Robert Ryman's white paintings:

> The work of Ryman I was not familiar with, until I saw this retrospective show. And it was amazing to see what had happened to his dedication to white . . . I came away from that exhibition with a renewed sense of joy, and even a joy close to a change of mind . . . . And the discoveries don't give you a sense of the loss of the ability to discover, but rather, an intensification of that.[36]

36 John Cage, interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Geneva, 12 September 1990

Jameson's analyses seem to lack this quality of renewed joy before significant discovery for the simple reason that they discredit this eventuality from the very beginning of their inquiries. As he points out in 'Postmodernism and utopia', and in his earlier essay 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of capitalism' (1984), such dogmatic assumptions invariably fail at the very point at which they seem most likely to succeed, because the critic 'paints himself into a corner' where his critical sensibility becomes 'paralysed . . in the face of the model itself'[37]

37 Jameson 'Postmodernism and utopia', p 16, 'Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism', New Left Review, no 146 (1984), p 57

Throughout his essay on video-art Jameson's critical sensibility appears to be paralysed by his assertion that postmodern culture coincides with the 'death' of the author, the spectator and any kind of meaningful creativity. Having painted himself into a corner in which the concept of 'mediated' appears synonymous with 'exterminated', Jameson has no other option than to reiterate the tired complaint:

> The autonomous work of art . . along with the old subject or ego – seems to have vanished, to have been volatized. Nowhere is this more materially demonstrable than within the 'texts' of experimental video. (p. 208)

Jameson could not be more mistaken. Nowhere are the artist's and the spectator's subjectivity more relentlessly registered, resurrected and reaffirmed than in postmodern video-art, video-installations and multi-media performance.

Firstly, as Cage and Paik suggest, the very process of employing the new technologies may function as a conceptual revelation for the artist. Discussing the tape-recorder, Cage proposes that magnetic tape 'introduces the unknown with such clarity that anyone has the opportunity of having his habits blown away like dust'.[38] Paik

38 John Cage, Silence (Middletown Connecticut Wesleyan University Press 1973), p 16

39 Paik, 'Afterlude to the exposition of experimental television', p 386.

40 Rosalind Krauss, 'Video the aesthetics of narcissism', in Gregory Battcock (ed.), New Artists Video A Critical Anthology (New York E P Dutton, 1978), p 45.
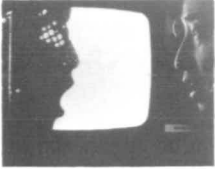
Nam June Paik, Self Portrait (1970) [Photo: Eric Kroll]

Vito Acconci, Face off (1972)

Robert Morris, Exchange (1973) [Photo: Gwenn Thomas]

41 Paik's Self-Portrait (1970) is illustrated in Battcock, p. 122; Acconci's Face-Off (1972) is illustrated, p 118. and Morris's Exchange (1973) is illustrated, p. 19.

42 Mona da Vinci, 'Video The art of observable dreams', in Battcock, New Artists Video. p 17.

43 Paik's Nam June Paik, Edited for TV (1976) is illustrated in Battcock, New Artists Video. p 22.

44 John Cage, Silence (Middletown, Connecticut Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p 93

45 Krauss, 'Video the aesthetics of narcissism'. p 45

likewise argues that experiments with television expose the artist to radical alternatives to the 'one book with one-way direction' of 'poor Joyce', and speculates that television collages and installations may well reveal glimpses of 'Eternity', insofar as 'The simultaneous perception of the parallel flow of thirteen independent TV movements can perhaps realize this old dream of mystics'.[39] As Cage and Paik indicate, the video-artist's subject or ego may frequently be 'volatized' very productively by the new media in the very process of creating an installation or artwork. Secondly, at a subsequent performative or explorative level, the interactive relationships between the artist or the viewer and the completed installation or artwork similarly provoke states of heightened self-awareness before the camera.

As Rosalind Krauss reminds us, most video-art produced on tape employs 'the body of the artist-practitioners' as its 'central instrument'.[40] One thinks of Paik's *Self Portrait* (1970); of Vito Acconci's attempt to frustrate this process in *Face-Off* (1972); or Robert Morris's multiple self-portraits in *Exchange* (1973).[41] The more one examines such video-works, the more obvious it becomes that it is postmodern intertextual theory – not postmodern multi-media art – which conspires to shortcircuit 'traditional interpretive temptations'. (p. 219)

Or as Mona da Vinci puts it, video is a medium 'encouraging self-analysis'.[42] Far from neutralizing authoriality and meaning, a tape such as Paik's *Nam June Paik, Edited for TV* (1976) begs definition as a highly personal contribution to explicit cultural debate. Wittily juxtaposing the image of Paik's frowning face with the caption: 'But then I thought: Actually "zen" is boring too',[43] this work almost certainly responds to the celebrated passage in *Silence* in which John Cage defends the teachings of Zen, observing:

> In Zen they say: If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting.[44]

Paik's tape then, seems best understood as a very personal dramatization of his riposte to another specific subjectivity: John Cage. In somewhat the same way, viewers examining video-installations might be said to dramatize their analysis of the cameras, monitors and mirrors making up such works as they walk within them, modifying their understanding as they modify images of their movements. To quote Krauss again, 'the central instrument' of such video-installations 'has usually been the body of the responding viewer'.[45] At the same time though, video-installations also correspond more than any other kind of video-art to Jameson's claim that the genre is primarily a self-referential practice, evoking 'reproductive technology itself'. (p. 222)

Nam June Paik, *Edited for TV*
(1976) [Photo: Erik Kroll]

46 René Magritte's *Reproduction
Prohibited (Portrait of Mr James)*
(1937) is illustrated on the front
cover of Dawn Ades, *Dada and
Surrealism* (London: Thames and
Hudson, 1974).

Peter Campus, *Shadow
Projection* (1974)
[Photo: Christopher Coughlan]

47 Campus's *Shadow Projection*
(1974) is illustrated in Battcock,
New Artists Video, p. 101.

**Nam June Paik with Charlotte
Moorman,** *Concerto for TV
Cello and Videotapes* (1971)
[Photo: Erik Kroll]

48 Paik's *TV Bra for Living
Sculpture* (1969) and *Concerto
for TV Cello and Videotapes*
(1971) are illustrated in Battcock,
New Artists Video, pp. 124 and
126. Paik's comments on *TV Bra*
appear in his essay (coauthored
with Charlotte Moorman) 'TV Bra
for Living Sculpture', in Battcock,
New Artists Video, p. 129

49 Gregory Battcock, 'Disaster in
New York', in Battcock, *New
Artists Video*, p. 133

Paradoxically perhaps, video-installations activate and accelerate two quite different modes of perception. As Jameson postulates, they invite the impersonal analysis of their technological structure and construction. But as Krauss remarks this analysis is itself born of the viewer's extremely personal experience of performing and observing successive physical gestures monitored and mediated by an installation. In this respect, the viewer's physical and cerebral participation are interlinked with unprecedented intimacy and immediacy. Contemplating a painting like Magritte's *Reproduction Prohibited (Portrait of Mr James)* (1937), one responds from without to an image of exterior perception: Magritte's paradoxical reiterated image of Mr James's back, standing before, and reflected within, the mirror before him.[46] By contrast, installations such as Peter Campus's *Shadow Projection* (1974) reveal video's capacity to place the viewer within an inescapably interactive situation; in this instance, 'doubling' evidence of self-awareness by superimposing images of both the spectator's back and the spectator's shadow.[47]

The same kind of intensified subjectivity emerges in another variant of video-art: the multi-media performance, in which actions upon stage and actions upon screen intermingle. At its most amusing and most provocative, this quintessentially postmodern mode of performance culminates in works such as Paik's *TV Cello* and *TV Bra*. According to the artist, *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), a performance-installation requiring Charlotte Moorman to play a cello connected to two screens adorning her breasts, exemplified a more 'human use of technology',[48] in the sense that it allows the performer to wear and to play video; a historic victory as it were for subjectivity over the electronic media. Commenting upon the way in which 'the performer caused images on the screen to change' in this work's companion piece, *Concerto for TV Cello and Videotapes* (1971), Gregory Battcock enthusiastically observed:

> It was an extraordinary conception and a theoretical masterpiece, because instead of 'being on television', the televisions were, in fact, on Charlotte Moorman.[49]

Battcock's rhetoric offers a refreshing alternative to Jameson's gloomy generalizations. While the lines above delightedly acclaim Paik's *TV Cello* as a masterpiece, Jameson's fidelity to anti-authorial theory leads him to dismiss the very possibility of video-artists or video-masterpieces. Bewildered by video's 'multiplicity of new forms', Jameson rather plaintively confides: 'one is tempted to wonder whether any description or theory could ever encompass their variety' (p. 203), before once again intoning his familiar litany of disbelief:

> there are no video masterpieces, there can never be a video canon, even an auteur theory of video . . . becomes very problematic indeed. (pp. 208–9)

Trapped by his own theoretical prejudices within an analytical double bind asserting that all postmodern 'texts' are superficial sub-monumental disappointments which 'all turn out to be "the same" in a peculiarly unhelpful way' (p. 222), Jameson attempts to evade his unhelpful anti-authorial assumptions by recourse to the authorial fiction that he proudly describes as 'a kind of myth I have found useful in characterizing the nature of contemporary (postmodernist) cultural production'. (p. 222) According to this mythology, 'the moment of modernism' witnesses the decline of 'the referent, or the objective world, or reality', to 'a feeble existence on the horizon like a shrunken star or red dwarf'. (p. 222)

In the wake of this precursor, postmodern culture demands definition as an era of total crisis, when 'reference and reality disappear altogether'. Elaborating this apocalyptic fiction, Jameson concludes:

> we are left with that pure and random play of signifiers . . . which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type, but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage; metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts. (p. 223)

Interpreted in this way, the mediated reality of postmodernism appears to represent the dead-end of Modernism; or a realm of ceaselessly recycled, sub-monumental fragments, bereft of all prior value. Viewed diagrammatically, this reading of the transition from Modernism to postmodernism (or the sad story of cultural decline from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties), might be represented by the falling hypotenuse of an erstwhile lofty triangle:

Modernism

postmodernism

1910...   ...1950s
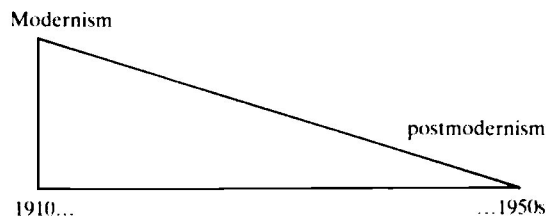
While one may have many reservations and doubts about many aspects of postmodern creativity, it is absurd to dismiss present times as an era of post-mortem culture, devoid of authorial or aesthetic life. Such anti-authorial and anti-aesthetic speculation is

still more misleading than the authorial and aesthetic mythologies which it purports to correct Viewed more carefully, the decline of Modernism – or the existential and aesthetic confusion of the thirties, forties and fifties – leads not so much to the terminal dead-end of creativity, as to the painful transitional process separating Modernism's demise from the rise of postmodern creativity. Briefly, the three decades from the mid-fifties to the present are best understood as a period of intense cultural rejuvenation and innovation marked by the live-ends of what one might think of as postmodern techno-culture

For one reason or another, Jameson and many other theorists appear incapable of looking beyond the crises of the mid-twentieth century. Or put another way, in terms of a paradox outlined by the East German writer Heiner Müller, Jameson seems to be trapped behind a 'time-wall', unable either to enter or even envisage postmodernism's positive new discursive spaces. Introducing the concept of the 'time-wall' with reference to the way in which this kind of obstruction may have protected Moscow in the last war, Heiner Muller comments

> I was very impressed by the remark of a young man who was writing an essay on my work He remembered that he never quite understood why the German Wehrmacht didn't succeed in entering Moscow during the Second World War. They just stood there They couldn't go further. He didn't believe in geographic reasons He didn't believe in ideological reasons. There simply was a time-wall. They were not on the same track.[50]

50 Heiner Muller, 'The Walls of History', interviewed by Sylvère Lottringer *Semiotext(e)*, vol 4, no 2 (1982), p 37

51 See Baudrillard, *Amérique* p 146 For further discussion of Baudrillard's use of this concept see my article Baudrillard's *Amérique* and the Abyss of Modernity *Art and Text* no 29 (1988) pp 40–63

Heiner Müller's image of the 'time-wall' proves particularly helpful. While one would not want to argue that entire nations or generations are trapped behind such barriers (as Baudrillard proposes, when suggesting that the 'abyss of modernity' separates French intellectuals from America),[51] it would certainly seem to be the case that an overdose of intertextual dogma and of apocalyptic mythology prevents Jameson and his fellow thinkers from coming to terms with the rise of postmodernism Charted diagrammatically, the transition between Modernism and the first three or four decades of postmodernism begs representation in terms of two equally monumental aesthetic eras separated by the crises and the 'time-wall' peculiar to the decades between the mid-thirties and mid-fifties.

Trapped behind the thirties—fifties 'time-wall', Jameson compulsively contrasts the apparent inauthenticity of the 'now' with the authenticity of Modernism's 'then' Veering close to self-parody, his most recent ponderings upon 'the new painting' dismiss this development as

> Surrealism without the Unconscious . . . Chagall's folk iconography without Judaism or the peasants, Klee's stick

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Modernism                                    postmodernism

                       The
                     '30s– 50s
                     Time-Wall

        1910                                          1980s
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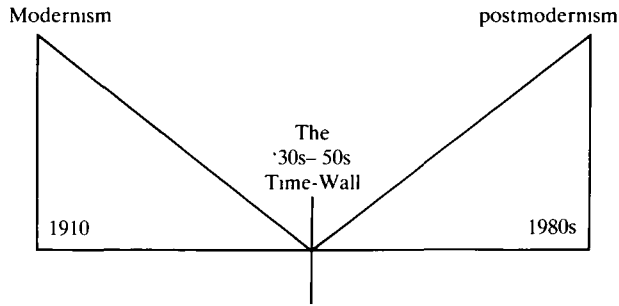
drawings without Klee's peculiar personal project, schizophrenic art without schizophrenia, 'surrealism' without its manifesto or its avant garde.[52]

52 Jameson Postmodernism and utopia pp 27 and 29 Jameson's conclusions elaborate the overstatements of the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva For further discussion of Bonito Oliva's conclusions see my article Postmodernity *métaphore manquée* and the myth of the trans-avant-garde' *Subs-Stance*, vol 14 no 3 (1986), pp 68–90

Jameson's cultural obituaries are surely premature. As the veteran Surrealist poet and novelist Louis Aragon rather unexpectedly proposes, crucial aspects of the Surrealist dream appear alive and well in that most recent of postmodern practices. the multi-media performance born of what one might think of as postmodernism's positive 'mediatic' sensibility Writing an open letter to André Breton about the first Paris production of Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance*, Aragon recalls:

> I never saw anything more beautiful in the world since I was born. Never has any play come anywhere near this one .   Bob Wilson's piece   which comes to us from Iowa, is not surrealism at all, however easy it is for people to call it that, but it is what we others, who fathered surrealism, what we dreamed it might become after us, beyond us.[53]

53 Louis Aragon 'Open Letter to Andre Breton' (2 June 1971), trans Linda Moses, in programme to Wilson's production of Heiner Muller's *Hamletmachine* (London Almeida Theatre 1987), unpaginated

'*After us, beyond us*': in four brief words, Aragon pinpoints the essential difference between positive variants of postmodernism and Modernism. Postmodernism is something that is not Modernism, that comes after Modernism; that is radically separated from Modernism; but which realizes Modernism's aspirations in terms of its own subsequent technology and sensibility. As I have suggested elsewhere, American postmodern creativity appears to assimilate and legitimate Modernism's innovations and discoveries, employing and extending them in a matter-of-fact, unselfconscious way, rather than announcing them as some sort of excursion into the surrealist realm of the 'marvellous' [54] Not surprisingly then, Robert Wilson's multi-media performances resist definition in terms of familiar surrealist categories. What one witnesses here is not so much neutralized surrealism, or 'Surrealism without the Unconscious', as *surrealism without friction* in an age in which its mysteries are public knowledge As William Burroughs remarks, 'the unconscious was

54 See my article Baudrillard s *Amérique* and the Abyss of modernity   p 56

55 William S Burroughs 'On Freud and the Unconscious', in *The Adding Machine* (New York Seaver Books, 1986) p 89

much more unconscious in Freud's day than in ours'.[55] If automatic writing and collage composition were novelties in the twenties, this is no longer the case.

Robert Wilson's multi-media performances typify the ways in which video-art precipitates some of the most interesting postmodern creativity of the eighties. Translating video's digital editing techniques and luscious colour into dazzlingly rapid or excruciatingly prolonged fusions of familiar real-time theatre and multi-mediated *son et lumière*, Wilson's works for the stage offer a litmus test to the spectator's sensibility, frustrating prior expectations but also affording the delight of new, emergent conventions to those willing and able to look beyond the 'time-wall' of habit Not surprisingly, one's first experience of Wilson's work is very much a process of examining and defining it as self-referential 'reproductive technology itself' (p 222) But thereafter, more positive post-Jamesonian categories come to mind.

The more closely one examines Wilson's work and the more times one attends a particular example of Wilson's work, the more evident it becomes that his multi-media theatre is not *simply* a surprising 'structure or sign-flow which resists meaning' (219), but rather a sign-flow which *generates* meaning, although not, perhaps, the kind of meaning to which one is accustomed. As Stefan Brecht reports, Wilson seems most interested to create conditions in which one senses 'a non-verbal, arational communication taking place . by harmonious vibration' [56]

56 Stefan Brecht *The Theatre of Visions Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1978), p 271

At times, this kind of 'arational communication' emerges between the lines and the gestures of traditional theatrical performance But at its most forceful, the impact of Wilson's imagination reaches us through the utterly postmodern state-of-the-art technology that Eco associates with 'a series of elements filtered through the mass media' [57] Considered in terms of the unfashionable concept of the author, Wilson's vision might also be said to be 'filtered' through his correspondingly postmodern 'state-of-the-art' *sensibility*, born of and attuned to video's capacity to accelerate, decelerate, fragment, superimpose, juxtapose and generally transmute sound, image, colour and movement with unprecedented immediacy and precision.

57 Eco *Travels in Hyperreality* p 213

Faced with such shifts in creative technology and sensibility, cultural critics tend to suspend or assert disbelief, entrusting themselves to new developments beyond the 'time-wall' of familiar discourse, or distrusting and denouncing new unfamiliar practices. Writing to the *Village Voice* in 1966, John Cage memorably exemplified the former option, announcing:

> Nowadays everything happens at once and our souls are conveniently electronic (omniattentive).[58]

58 Cage Letter to *The Village Voice* (January 1966), in Kostelanetz (ed) *John Cage* p 167

At the other extreme, Jameson argues that postmodern video-art and multi-media performance 'ought not to have any "meaning" '

59 Georg Lukacs *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans John and Necke Mander (London Merlin 1963), p 33

60 Renato Poggioli *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge Massachusetts The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1968) p 137

61 Alexai Gan Constructivism in Stephen Bann (ed) *The Tradition of Constructivism* pp 36 and 35 Kasimir Malevich, title of painting of 1917 cited by Aaron Scharf Suprematism, in Tony Richardson and Nikos Stangos *Concepts of Modern Art* (Harmondsworth Penguin 1974) p 139 As Scharf comments Malevich's Suprematist compositions appear to aspire to the final emancipation a state of nirvana

62 Robert Wilson, 'Robert Wilson Current Projects (1980), interview with Laurence Shyer in *Robert Wilson the Theater of Images* (New York Harper and Row 1984) pp 113 and 111

63 Nam June Paik interviewed by Nicholas Zurbrugg, Sydney 10 April 1990, forthcoming *Scan+* (Sydney)

(p 217), somewhat as Lukács claims that 'modernism must deprive literature of a sense of perspective'.[59]

Neither Modernism, postmodernism – or whatever follows – 'ought to' or 'must' necessarily *neutralize* meaning or perspective On the contrary, new practices appear 'new' precisely because they *dramatize* relatively unconventional modes of representing and evaluating reality (Conversely, such dramatizations only seem to neutralize meaning insofar as their new possibilities *precede* theoretical legitimization). In this respect anti-art is best understood as ante-art, adumbrating new conventions [60]

As post-revolutionary Russian experiments demonstrate, innovative creativity does not so much extinguish old values and old debates as rekindle them in new contexts. Creating predominantly similar geometrical compositions, Constructivists such as Alexei Gan associated 'industrial culture' with the death and disappearance of 'theology, metaphysics and mysticism', whereas Suprematists such as Kasimir Malevich entitled their work with such self-consciously metaphysical definitions as *Suprematist composition conveying the feeling of a mystic 'wave' from outer space* [61]

History repeats itself in the eighties. While Jameson argues that postmodern culture brings about 'the extinction of the sacred and the "spiritual"' (p 199), Robert Wilson discusses ways of conveying the sacred and the spiritual with technological symbolism Referring to his projected production of Wagner's *Parsifal*, Wilson speculates for example that 'vertical beams of light' might evince a more authentic 'religious attitude' than the 'fake' and 'sacrilegious detail' of 'naturalistic acting' [62]

To discuss Wilson's art in this way is obviously to cite it as what Jameson would term a 'privileged exemplar' (p 219) of postmodern creativity Writing on emergent media, one necessarily gestures in the dark, attempting to identify the most significant examples of new, unfamiliar practices, in order to delineate their most varied traits Jameson's meditations upon video-art and upon multi-media performance select far too few examples, and focus upon weak examples which confirm rather than challenge his over-systematic and overly-simplistic presuppositions.

Trapped behind the 'time-wall' of Barthesian and Baudrillardian overstatement, Jameson's writings appear to function most profitably as 'privileged exemplars' of the dangers of reacting over-literally to such 'imported and extrapolated categories' (p 201) To be sure, authorial essentialism and the excesses of 'traditional interpretive temptations' (p. 219) may also prove counter-productive, but they do at least have the virtue of directing critical attention toward innovative creativity, rather than prompting arrogant denial of its existence and its authenticity. As Nam June Paik suggests, 'We must give up certain parts of intellectual vanity, and look at the good parts of so-called high-tech research'[63]

Adequate exegesis of postmodern video and multi-media
performance requires the critic to forsake intertextual essentialism
and apocalyptic cliche, and to return to the rather more daunting
tasks of *observing*, *analysing*, *interpreting* and *evaluating* the new arts
of the eighties and the nineties

Aspects of ideology and narrative form in the American war film

STEVE NEALE

1 See, among others Antony
Easthope *What a Man's Gotta
Do The Masculine Myth in
Popular Culture* (London Paladin,
1986), pp 61–8 and 'Realism
and subversion Hollywood and
Vietnam', in Alf Louvre and
Jeffrey Walsh (eds), *Tell Me Lies
About Vietnam Cultural Battles
for the Meaning of the War*
(Milton Keynes Open University
Press 1988) Susan Jeffords,
'Friendly civilians images of
women and the feminization of
the audience in Vietnam films
Wide Angle vol 7, no 4 (1985),
pp 13–22, and Masculinity as
excess in Vietnam films the
father/son dynamic of American
culture', *Genre* no 21 (1988),
pp 487–515, and *The
Remasculinization of America
Gender and the Vietnam War*
(Bloomington Indiana University
Press 1989), Tania Modleski, A
father is being beaten male
feminism and the war film,
Discourse vol 10 no 2 (1988),
pp 62–77 Claudia Springer
Rebellious sons in Vietnam
combat films a response
Genre, no 21 (1988), pp
517–22 Susan White Male
bonding, Hollywood Orientalism
and the repression of the
feminine in Kubrick s *Full Metal
Jacket* *Arizona Quarterly* vol
44, no 3 (1988) pp 120–44

This article seeks to examine some of the ways in which a number of the elements, conventions and devices of mainstream Hollywood cinema intersect with some of the conventions and ideological concerns of the American war film. As a great deal of the most interesting recent writing on the genre has indicated, these concerns centrally include the representation of men and masculinity, and the articulation of masculine obsessions and fantasies.[1] I discuss these concerns towards the end of the article. Before that, though, I seek to highlight what I see as a related and equally central but separate issue. In all narratives there exist disparities in knowledge and power among and between the characters. In war films these disparities often correspond to – and are always articulated across – differences in military rank. Always at stake, therefore, in war films are the ideological – and political – questions raised by these disparities and differences, and the ways and means by which they are handled I propose the existence of two distinct formal traditions in the war film, two ways of focusing these questions. In both cases, I argue, particular representations of masculinity and particular configurations of masculine fantasy tend to accompany the articulation of these issues and questions insofar as discrepancies in power and rank often function as a matrix for the generation of markedly Oedipal tensions and conflicts In both cases, too, the disparities in narrative knowledge and power upon which these concerns and questions are founded are dependent upon the specifically formal means and devices of motivation, on the one hand, and upon narration and point of view, on the other It is with

a discussion of these means and devices, and their bearing on these issues in the war film, that I therefore begin

Motivation

Battleground (1949) opens at a US army camp in France in 1944 As Sergeant Kinnie (James Whitmore) is drilling his men, we learn that some of them think the end of the war is imminent. A conversation in a tent that night serves to establish, among other things, that the men are looking forward to leave in Paris the following day. Next morning, however, Kinnie wakes them up with the news that 'Nobody's going to Paris. We're going up. In trucks.' *Torpedo Run* (1958) begins *in medias res* with a successful American submarine attack on a Japanese ship. In flashback shortly after, we see the submarine's commander, Barney Doyle (Glenn Ford), celebrating his daughter's fifth birthday party at home in Manilla with his wife and a naval colleague and friend. The party, and plans for a fishing trip, are abruptly interrupted by a telephone call – 'Something about Pearl Harbour' *Paths of Glory* (1957) begins with a scene in which General Boulard (Adolphe Menjou) arrives at the headquarters of General Mireau (George MacReady) to persuade him, with hints of promotion, to try to take an enemy stronghold on the nearby Western Front known as 'The Anthill'. Mireau visits the trenches to galvanize his men (some of them close to breaking point and trying to recuperate during a lull in the fighting), to persuade Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) to lead the attack, and to watch the bloody and abortive battle that ensues the following day.

In the first ten minutes or so of each of these three films, we are presented, in one way or another, with what might be called 'the initial event', the event that initiates the narrative· a group of soldiers are suddenly summoned to the front; the Japanese attack Pearl Harbour; a General is persuaded to order his regiment to attack an enemy stronghold. Events of this kind always disrupt a 'primary situation'. Preceding the chain of events that constitutes the narrative proper, and either inferred by the spectator or directly represented, any primary situation is generally one of stability and order (however fragile), and often exists in marked and generically appropriate contrast to all that follows the initial event. Thus, primary situations in horror films are characterized by the absence of monsters and monstrosity, and the havoc and terror they later create; primary situations in romantic melodramas are marked by the absence of romance, and the emotional turmoil, excitement – and difficulty – it can generate; and so on. In war films, primary situations are usually peaceful – either combat, or war itself, have not yet begun This is certainly true of *Battleground*, *Torpedo Run* and *Paths of Glory*. In the first, a group of soldiers are at rest, away

from the front and its dangers, and looking forward, not to the fighting and hardship that follow, but to leave and the pleasures of Paris In the second, a family group happily celebrate a family occasion, just prior to the war that will not only separate father from daughter and wife, but will also render that separation permanent when, later on, wife and daughter are killed. And in the third, the primary situation is a period of peaceful military stalemate

In war films there can, in fact, be two primary situations (and hence two initial events) They correspond to two distinct narratives: the specific and local military conflict upon which any one film tends to focus, and the general and contextual narrative formed by the chronology of the war in which it is set. Although some knowledge of the second, contextual narrative is always assumed, and although some reference to it is nearly always made (if only in introductory title sequences, voice overs, dedications and the like), it tends to remain implicit. Nevertheless, it is a narrative with specific structural features, as well as specific historical and chronological parameters, and these features have important effects. Its primary situation (a state of peace) and its initial event (the outbreak of war) can, for instance, coincide with, overdetermine, or even, occasionally, constitute, the primary situation and initial event in the first, more localized narrative. In *Torpedo Run*, for example, the outbreak of war disrupts an implied and generalized state of peace and an explicit and particular state of domestic and familial harmony at one and the same time It also provides the conditions for the military narrative that occupies most of the rest of the film.[2] In addition, even where the relationship between the two narratives is neither so overt nor so concrete (as in *Paths of Glory* and *Battleground*), the hallmark of the primary situation in the contextual narrative – the absence of war and all it entails – tends always to qualify and colour any other primary situation a war film may involve.

In many narratives, of any kind, initial events can be markedly arbitrary. It is, of course, true that, from a certain viewpoint at least, all the events in a narrative are arbitrary. For, as Gérard Genette has argued, there is always, in the concatenation of events that comprise any narrative, a degree of unpredictability (from the reader's or spectator's point of view) and of apparent freedom of choice (from the point of view of any real or putative narrator) [3] This does not mean, as Genette goes on to point out, that the events in a narrative have no function, or that the narrative itself has no structure. Far from it It merely means that structure and function are themselves arbitrary, are themselves, along with the circumstantial specificities that mark any narrative, open to choice This in turn means that the events which begin a narrative, which establish its structure and initiate its sequence of functions, are particularly arbitrary. for, from the point of view of the spectator,

2 In this particular instance it also precludes the possibility of a third narrative or narrative strand centred on a heterosexual romance In fact a romance plot here seems to be actively repressed or displaced In its stead is developed a narrative thread centred on the friendship between Doyle and his second-in-command (played by Ernest Borgnine) The option of a romance plot is by no means entirely closed to the war film (as films like *The Immortal Sergeant* [1943], *Battle Cry* [1955] and *The Battle of Midway* [1976] all show), but neither is a process of repression of the kind that occurs in *Torpedo Run* films as otherwise diverse as *Hell's Angels* [1930] and *Rambo First Blood, Part II* [1985] are marked by similar processes

3 Gérard Genette 'Vraisemblance et motivation', in *Figures II* (Paris Seuil 1969) pp 71–99

this is the point in any narrative of maximum unpredictability. Such events can therefore be particularly difficult to motivate It is, indeed, one of the major tasks of motivation to disguise the structural and functional role of events and in general to quell 'the arbitrariness of the narrative'.[4] Genette argues that the most arbitrary event in any narrative is in fact the *dénouement*, since it is around the *dénouement* that the other narrative events, and any patterns of motivation, are ultimately organized.[5] I would argue that while this is true from the narrator's point of view, so to speak, or from the retrospective point of view of the spectator, it is precisely because the *dénouement* is prepared for by preceding events and forms of motivation, while the beginning itself is not, that it is at the beginning of a narrative that this arbitrariness is most apparent.

One indication of this difficulty is the extent to which, in Hollywood films, initial events can be governed by modes of causality that differ from those used elsewhere As David Bordwell has pointed out, events in Hollywood narratives tend as a rule to be governed by personal rather than impersonal modes of causality: 'impersonal causes . . . provide the circumstantial background, while *personal* causes – especially character psychology – propel the narrative '[6] There are exceptions, however, and initial events are among them· 'Impersonal causes may initiate or abruptly alter a line of story action';[7] only then does it proceed in the usual – personally causal – way This does not, of course, mean that initial events are *always* impersonally caused Even where they are not, though, even where a personalized cause is provided, vestiges of impersonality still tend to cling They do so not only because they are the hallmarks of the arbitrariness inherent in any initial event, but also because they are the hallmarks of *power*: the power to initiate a chain of events, the power to disturb a situation of relative stability and order – the power to disrupt the characters' lives. All of which is especially evident – and important – in the war film.

In *Torpedo Run* the initial event is, as we have seen, the outbreak of war itself The outbreak of war is, of course, as Bordwell points out, a common instance of impersonal causality in Hollywood films. Its use is by no means restricted to war films as such, nor is it necessarily confined to initial events. (*Seventh Heaven* [1928], a romantic melodrama, is testimony to both these points.) In war films, though, as opposed, perhaps, to other genres, the attribution of an agency responsible for the outbreak of war can be an important ideological issue. (This is, of course, especially true of war films with some kind of contemporary propagandist function; it therefore applies to most of the war films made in America during the latter part of World War I, and most of World War II.) At one level this can be viewed as an attempt to personalize an impersonal cause, to invest the enemy with the attributes of arbitrariness attaching both to initial events and to impersonal causes. (It tends

4 Ibid p 92

5 Ibid p 94

6 David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley University of California Press 1981), p 26

7 David Bordwell Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson *The Classical Hollywood Cinema Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London Routledge, 1985) p 13

also to invest the enemy with the attribute of power, and this too is important in propaganda, in films concerned to mobilize a population against an enemy in time of war.) However, as in *Torpedo Run* itself, where we do not actually witness events at Pearl Harbour, and where we see very little of the Japanese throughout the remainder of the film, the process can work the other way round, and the enemy can become an almost totally impersonal force (a fairly common phenomenon, of course, and one with ideological implications and advantages of its own)

The enemy in *Paths of Glory* and *Battleground* are as impersonal as they are in *Torpedo Run* In these films, though, the outbreak of war has already occurred and is never referred to What they focus on throughout is a specific and localized military narrative Both films attribute agents to the initiation of these narratives – to the disruption, that is, of primary situations which are marked as relatively secure for the men whose lives are subsequently not only disrupted, but also placed directly at risk. In both cases officers, whose rank gives them authority – hence power – over the lives of these men, are centrally involved. It is at this point, though, that the films begin to differ. They differ ideologically in their attitudes to this power and its use, in their attitudes to the effects it has on the men subject to it; and, by implication at least, in their attitudes to the context and conduct of warfare of which this power is either a cause or a consequence (or both) But they do so because they differ *formally* in the way in which they attribute responsibility for the initial event, and in the way in which they deploy the attributes of arbitrariness and impersonality.

In *Paths of Glory*, what sets the narrative in motion is the arrival of General Broulard and General Mireau's subsequent decision to attempt an attack on The Anthill. An initiating cause is thus not only identified, but personalized· it is Broulard who requests that an attack on The Anthill be tried, and Mireau who, for the personalized reasons of pride and ambition, agrees. The power of these officers, and their responsibility for the attack, are thus jointly marked. Moreover, while not exactly arbitrary (indeed it is precisely motivated), Mireau's decision, in particular, is tinged with an obvious irrationality: his initial and considered judgement is that an attack of the kind proposed would be fruitless (as indeed it proves to be); only when tempted with the offer of a higher command should an attack succeed does he set his better judgement aside. (Mireau's irrationality is of course later stressed when he orders his artillery to fire on his own men.) However, the hallmarks of a less equivocal arbitrariness, and, in addition, of impersonality, can also be found in this opening: Broulard's initial arrival, and the initial idea for the attack, originate not, we are told, in decisions taken by Broulard himself, but in decisions taken elsewhere, at 'Headquarters' While, by common sense implication at least,

'Headquarters' is a collection of individual, high-ranking officers, we never know who these officers are. Thus the impersonal, institutional nature of the term is underlined. In addition, the reasons for its decisions are never made clear. Thus the arbitrary nature of those decisions are brought to the fore. On the one hand this means that Mireau and Broulard are themselves seen as subject to a higher authority, just like the soldiers Mireau orders into battle But on the other hand, because, unlike these soldiers, Mireau and Broulard have some kind of power, and because they do not use it to challenge Headquarters' decisions, they are marked as agents, rather than victims, of its arbitrary impersonality. (In this respect, of course, they are contrasted with Dax, who tries to use his more limited powers as a junior officer to protect his men, and who later directly challenges Mireau's authority when he defends three soldiers chosen, on Mireau's orders, by lot – by specifically impersonal and arbitrary means – to stand trial for cowardice after the attack on The Anthill has failed.)

One of the reasons, then, why *Paths of Glory* emerges as an 'anti-war' film is that it establishes an opposition of interests between ordinary soldiers and high-ranking military authority, and a concomitant hierarchy of power Another reason is that it is this authority, rather than the enemy, which is invested with the attributes of arbitrariness and impersonality inherent in the initial event, and it is this authority, rather than the enemy, which is marked as responsible for the suffering and death of the men, as the causal agent ultimately underlying their misfortunes (The enemy's impersonality, noted above, emerges therefore as a function of its *lack* of connection to initial narrative causality, of its *lack* of responsibility for the fate of the men, rather than the other way round This in turn is, in part at least, a function of the absence of any real reference to any contextual narrative, any contextual primary situation or any contextual initial event, any one of which might have implicated the enemy more causally, and thus modified the extent to which the film is able to attribute sole responsibility for events to Headquarters, Broulard and Mireau.) A further, final reason, of course, is that the military operation is a failure. This means both that the authorities are seen to lack not only feeling for the men but also strategic and tactical judgement, and that the suffering, misfortune and death which they cause lack any ultimate justification, or final, redeeming outcome

In all these respects, *Battleground* provides points of contrast Here. it is true, the immediate and personalized agent of narrative disruption is Sergeant Kinnie, a non-commissioned officer, someone in authority, someone with the power to disturb the men's sleep, disrupt their plans for leave and order them up to the front. And here, as in *Paths of Glory*, this agent is acting on behalf of an impersonalized Headquarters. The difference is that Headquarters,

8 For an account of this, and of other factors surrounding the production of the film see the following articles by Ian Jarvie Fanning the flames anti-American reaction to *Operation, Burma!* [sic] (1945) *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* vol 1 no 2 (1981) pp 117–37, Suppressing controversial films from *Objective, Burma!* to Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, in Bruce A Austin (ed), *Current Research in Film Audiences, Economics and Law*, vol 1 (Norwood Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985) esp pp 185–91 and The Burma campaign on film *Objective Burma!* (1945) *The Stilwell Road* (1945) and *Burma Victory* (1945), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol 8 no 1 (1988) pp 55–73

9 See Jeanine Basinger *The World War II Combat Film Anatomy of a Genre* (New York Columbia University Press 1986) pp 18–82 and Kathryn Kane *Visions of War Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor UMI Research Press, 1976) pp 123–35

10 As Jarvie notes, there have always existed discrepancies among the running times recorded for *Objective Burma!* both on its initial release and on its later re-release in Britain in an amended form (see The Burma campaign on film', p 56 and note 3 p 69) The film was copyrighted at 149 mins The versions I have used in this study a 35mm viewing copy of the re-release print held in the National Film Archive and a copy of the video distributed by Warners (PES 99336) run at 129 and 136 mins , respectively

and therefore Kinnie too, are responding to the actions of the enemy. Their orders and actions are therefore motivated – justified – by the sudden (and, in the context, arbitrary) actions of an impersonal causal agency outside their control. Thus while, on the one hand, all the men suffer, and some of them die, on the other hand, such suffering and death are seen as the consequence of enemy activity rather than of the decisions and power of Headquarters. Moreover, in contrast to *Paths of Glory*, the men are ultimately victorious and the enemy attack is finally repulsed. Thus while the film in fact pays more attention to the courage and endurance of the men than to the plan of campaign at Headquarters, Headquarters' orders and powers are, by implication at least, all the more justified

In considering, and contrasting *Paths of Glory* and *Battleground* in this way, I do not mean to imply that either is 'better', ideologically or aesthetically, than the other I am simply trying to identify the extent to which aesthetic and ideological issues can overlap Although *Paths of Glory* has a much higher critical reputation than *Battleground*, both films, I would argue, tend to avoid the exploration of ideological ambiguities and tensions Much more interesting, from this point of view, is a film like *Objective, Burma!* (1945) *Objective, Burma!* is perhaps best known for its historical inaccuracies, and for the offence it caused the British press, and sectors of the British public, when first released.[8] However, along with other war films in a cycle that emerged in the mid-forties (a cycle that also includes *A Walk in the Sun* [1946], *They Were Expendable* [1945] and *The Story of G I Joe* [1945]), it has been considered to be of ideological interest for other reasons too [9] These reasons have again to do with the potential conflict of interest between ordinary soldiers and those in command. Again the essentially formal issue of motivation is at stake Also at stake, though, as we shall see, are the equally formal issues of point of view, narration, and the articulation of narrative knowledge.

Objective Burma![10]

In her study of American war films of the 1940s, Kathryn Kane summarizes *Objective, Burma!* as dealing, in narrative terms, with

> the difficulties of a company of paratroopers who are flown from their base in India, dropped into Burma to locate and destroy an enemy radar station, and who are then unable to get back to base Instead, they wander endlessly around in the jungle, occasionally receiving directions from planes which circle overhead keeping them supplied but not informed Finally, reluctantly obeying orders that send them in the opposite direction from home base,

11 Kane, *Visions of War* p 48

the few survivors are linked up with a large Allied invasion force and evacuated [11]

The initial event in the specific military narrative here consists of the decision taken by a high-ranking officer, Brigadier-General Merrill, to send paratroopers into the Burmese jungle to blow up a radar station This event is placed within the context of two preceding events the decision to mount a large-scale Allied operation in Burma, and the prior sealing off of the road into Burma by the Japanese. (A third contextual event, the initial invasion of Burma by the Japanese, is referred to briefly in a set of post-credit titles.) In a sense, of course, the number of primary situations disrupted at the beginning of the film are as numerous as these events (The importance and function of having several situations and events of this kind will be apparent in a moment.) The situation disrupted specifically by Merrill's decision, the one that involves the film's main characters, and the one that we actually see, is generically typical· when the men are called for a briefing and informed of their mission they are engaged in peaceful, everyday tasks and leisure activities – washing clothes, having a haircut, bathing, playing baseball and so on. One initial consequence of Merrill's decision is that these tasks and activities are immediately abandoned. Another, soon afterwards, is that the men are anxiously awaiting a parachute drop; yet another, soon after that, is that they find themselves in inhospitable jungle deep in enemy territory.

It is at this point that the purpose of the multiplicity of events and situations at the beginning of the film becomes clear. As things begin to get a little difficult (and of course potentially dangerous) for the men, the number of contextual events serves to motivate Merrill's decision and thus to make it seem less arbitrary. Any connotations of arbitrariness (and of the use of unwarranted power) have instead been attached to events initiated by the Japanese. (Were it not for the actions of the Japanese, there would be no need for dangerous missions; the men would be back home in America; they would not even be in Burma.) Moreover, Merrill's decision soon seems not only motivated and justified by the previous actions of the Japanese, but justified also by the progress of the mission the men locate the radar station with relative ease, destroy it, as ordered, without a single casualty, and find their way to an abandoned airstrip, where they are due to be picked up by plane, with time to spare for thoughts of leave. However, it is precisely at this point that things begin to go wrong, and motivation and justification begin to be undermined. From this point on the decisions of command begin to seem not only arbitrary, but impersonal, and a conflict of interests seems to develop between command and the men.

As the plane moves in to land, Japanese troops are spotted

nearby. Captain Nelson (Errol Flynn), the group's leader, hastily arranges a new rendezvous point with Lieutenant Barker, the plane's pilot (and Nelson's old friend) Barker reports back to Colonel Carter, the officer Merrill has placed in charge of the mission. Carter discusses the situation with a fellow officer The discussion marks the lack of power of Nelson's men, their dependence, on the one hand, on Carter and his actions, and, on the other hand, on the actions of the enemy. Causal agents beyond the men's control now govern their fate If one of these agents, the enemy, has already acquired marks of impersonality, the other, Colonel Carter, does so here. Having explained that he thinks the men cannot be airlifted out, that they will have to walk to the border, he concludes simply by saying, 'Let's get a cup of coffee', in tones whose matter-of-factness are almost impossible to capture in print

At the second rendezvous point, Barker drops supplies He also, 'in an inexplicably detached, almost casual manner',[12] conveys the news from Headquarters that the men will have to walk, and arranges a further rendezvous point with Nelson to drop more supplies. Having split the group in two to reach the second rendezvous point, Nelson waits for the others before moving on Survivors from the other group, however, arrive to report that it has been attacked by the Japanese, and most of its members killed These members are later discovered, their bodies horribly mutilated, when the men attack and enter a Burmese village By this time the arbitrary and impersonal causal onus, so to speak, seems to have shifted away from Carter and Headquarters and back again towards the Japanese It is now, though, in the midst of what is clearly a process of systematic oscillation, that we cut, once again, to Headquarters Carter's aide informs Barker that 'Wingate and Cochran flew in last night' and that there has been a big conference at GHQ. Carter arrives with orders for Nelson. He is to go North, away from home base, and 'stay there' There is no further explanation. Carter simply announces that he is going to get some sleep Barker asks the aide 'What's up?' 'Sorry,' he is told, 'can't tell you But it's OK, believe me '

At the next rendezvous point, Barker conveys Carter's orders to Nelson. Believability – and confidence in the authority and wisdom of command – are precisely now at issue for the men

> 'You hear that? We ain't going home '
> 'I hope they know what they're doing '
> 'If the order is North, they have a good reason for ordering us North.'
> 'Yeah Maybe '

Even Nelson's confidence has been shaken. He has been given no reason to go North. He can think of none himself When Sergeant

12 Ibid, p 101

Tracy voices misgivings, all he can do is appeal to authority by fiat:

'He said North I don't get it. That's directly away from the base. We're not going home?'
'I guess not '
'I don't get it. Don't like it either.'
'Neither do I. It's orders, so that's where we're going.'

As, firstly, the men are ambushed by the Japanese (who have been alerted by the dropping of supplies), and as we subsequently cut to Carter, who, on receiving no news of the whereabouts of Nelson and his men, declares that the search must now end, the process of oscillation between the two causal agents governing the fate of the men now becomes more rapid. As it does so the agents themselves, initially distinct – initially, indeed, at war with one another – now seem to converge Both now seem arbitrary. Both now seem impersonal Both now endanger the lives of the men.

Spurred on by Nelson, the men at last arrive at the new rendezvous point, only to find that 'there's nothing here Nothing ' The men are close to despair Nelson makes another appeal to 'orders' and they reluctantly dig themselves in By chance, an American plane flies overhead. They manage to attract its pilot's attention, and urgently needed supplies are dropped. Their luck seems to have turned. But the Japanese are alerted to their whereabouts by the presence of the plane and the dropping of supplies, and they mount a ferocious attack that night in the dark Only in the morning, in daylight, after a desperate struggle and the loss of more lives, has the enemy at last disappeared, and the sky at last, as Kane puts it, is 'miraculously' filled with American parachutes and planes [13] The invasion of Burma has begun, and the men are rescued at last

13 Ibid p 95

Only at the very end, then, are the film's primary causal agents placed, once again, in opposition. It should be noted, however, that the Japanese attack is repulsed by the men themselves, not by the forces under Carter's or Merrill's command. And while at one level the ending of *Objective, Burma!* clearly vindicates the trust placed by Nelson in command, its authority and its orders (everything in the end is, as Carter's aide promised, O K), at another level it merely reinforces both the arbitrariness of command, and, in the images of hundreds of planes overhead, its immense and *impersonal* power Meanwhile, the extent to which coincidence and chance are factors in this ending is unusual in a classical Hollywood film· 'The later in the film a coincidence occurs, the weaker it is; and it is very unlikely that the story will be resolved by coincidence.'[14] Coincidence here, however, helps to augment the impersonality of all the causal factors involved, and, in a film obsessed with all forms of cause and effect, to foreground the arbitrariness of all its causal

14 Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p 13

15 This 'obsession is particularly
evident in the extent to which
the film seems to insist on
showing every aspect of a
causal process from beginning
to end At the beginning, for
instance we see reconnaissance
photos being taken to a lab and
developed before they are shown
to Merrill Later on, when the
men blow up the radar station
we see each of the charges
being laid, and the detonator
primed, before the explosion
occurs And so on
16 Kane Visions of War, p 115
17 Ibid, p 101

18 Ibid, p 59

19 Ibid pp 44–8, 5–52, 58–9

agents and conventions.[15] Kane has stressed the extent to which impersonal modes of causality are generically conventional in war films· 'The events of the war, external to the men and to a large extent beyond their control, greatly determine the progress of . . . events.'[16] She has similarly stressed the generically appropriate role of chance. 'Often enough, the basic belief that men can do something to determine the course of events, their lives and indeed history, is vindicated – or threatened – by Chance '[17] In *Objective, Burma!*, though, the net result of the deployment of these elements and conventions, as is evident in the hesitation between 'will not' and 'cannot' that marks her summary of the film, is considerable ideological ambivalence

> The atmosphere from the beginning is oppressive, the conclusion inescapable· the men are doomed, not only by their occupation, but by the system that put them into the jungle and will not, cannot get them out [18]

Knowledge and point of view

In coming to this conclusion, Kane emphasizes the role – and in particular the failure – of systems of communication She links this to the role of technology in the film and to an opposition between technology and nature [19] Without in any way denying the validity of this view (and its relevance, not just to *Objective, Burma!*, but to the war film as a whole), I want to stress here instead its connection to the issues of knowledge and point of view – and *their* connection to the ideological issues with which I am concerned.

Coincident, in *Objective, Burma!*, with the successes and failures of command (with respect to its strategic and tactical objectives, and with respect to the safety of the men) are successes and failures of communication – between command, the pilots of its aircraft, and the men, on the one hand, and among the Japanese, on the other Coincident also, as a result, are a set of alignments, re-alignments, discrepancies and dislocations in the scales of narrative knowledge possessed by command, the Japanese, the men and, of course, the spectator. Communication in the film takes three principal forms: communication by direct aural/verbal contact (as in face-to-face speech); communication by indirect aural/verbal contact (principally radio), and communication by direct visual contact (as when the men are spotted signalling by means of a mirror and sunlight from the air) Before the mission starts, when the men are at their safest, face-to-face communication takes place betwen command and the men at their briefing Up until the end of the first rendezvous sequence, when the men have to turn the aircraft away, communication with the pilot (and hence with command) is simple

and easy, while a major means of Japanese communication (the radar station) has been literally destroyed However, the Japanese then communicate with one another by radio. They gather their forces together and pose an increasing threat to the men. At the third rendezvous point, where the men are ambushed, radio contact is lost because the men's radio is destroyed Attempts by direct visual means to signal to passing reconnaissance aircraft fail, and command calls off the search. Only at the final rendezvous point, by chance, as we have seen, are the men able to re-establish contact (by means of the mirror referred to above), and only after the attack in the dark, when the men are at last picked up, is indirect aural and direct visual communication with the pilot, at least, once more possible.

Along with reconnaissance photos and maps, these means of communication are also either means of gathering information, or sources of knowledge, or both Thus when things go wrong, and when communication is lost, there is also a loss, or lack, of knowledge: command loses track of the men, the map possessed by the men contains insufficient information about the terrain to help them plan their route, while the men can see a reconnaissance plane from the ground, all the pilot can see from the air, and all reconnaissance photographs show, is dense vegetation; and so on. The Japanese, meanwhile, gain information as to the whereabouts of the men with ease and efficiency. The dropping of supplies enables them to spot where the men are likely to be. A newly-severed branch, floating downstream, acts as a sign that the men are nearby. Encountering one another in the dark at the end (when neither side can properly see the other), it is significant, then, that a final lack of Japanese knowledge, evident when one of them tries and fails to convince an American soldier that he is American too (he wrongly assumes that the soldier's name is Joe), prominently figures in their final defeat.

These fluctuations in knowledge serve to mark fluctuations in the balance of power between command and the Japanese However, they also serve – consistently – to mark the powerlessness of the men· the extent to which they are dependent upon command (and its knowledge), and the extent to which they are threatened by the Japanese throughout. Our knowledge, as spectators, also fluctuates, as is common, of course, in classical narrative films. Sometimes, like the men, we are unsure precisely where we are We are unsure whether the movement behind the leaves of shrubs and trees is the movement of friend or foe We are unsure as to the precise whereabouts of the Japanese, and as to the precise plans and actions of command. At other times, we know what the men cannot know, because we see what they cannot see, and hear what they cannot hear We know before the men do that they are going to be sent North. We see the Japanese watching supplies being dropped from

20 On point of view in its various guises see Edward Branigan *Point of View in the Cinema A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (New York Mouton, 1984) and Nick Browne *The Rhetoric of Filmic Narration* (Ann Arbor UMI Research Press 1982)

the air We know that command has lost track of the men because we see the reconnaissance photos, and because we see and hear Carter say so We also know, as the men do not, that Carter abandons the search Our knowledge, then, shifts as the narrative proceeds, across shifts both in optical and in narrative point of view, and therefore in the objects they focus.[20] It tends also to accumulate As it does so, and as we move, in particular, back and forth between command and the men, we are increasingly in a position to register the power of command, and the men's dependence upon it But we are not quite in a position to know why the men are sent North, nor are we quite in a position to read Carter's manner and tone We do not fully know the motives underlying his behaviour, the reasons for his orders and his actions And this is one of the reasons why we, like the men, can only find these orders and actions rather arbitrary and therefore unsettling. In the end, of course, we become retrospectively aware that Carter and the others in command have of necessity, been concerned, first and foremost, with what the film calls 'The Big Operation'. And in the end, of course, the interests of command, the men and The Big Operation coincide But the accidental (or partially accidental) nature of that coincidence makes us all the more aware of the extent to which the men have been only a small – and ultimately expendable – part of a larger, and therefore necessarily impersonal, plan of campaign Inasmuch as this is the case, *Objective, Burma!* can be seen to undermine any ideology – and fantasy – of adventure to which it might, like so many Hollywood war films, otherwise have been prone

The extent to which means of communication and means of acquiring information and knowledge are brought to the fore in *Objective, Burma!*, and the extent to which a stress on the audiovisual nature of those means leads to a stress on the faculties of looking and listening (the very faculties used by any spectator in the cinema) is perhaps unique to this particular war film But the use of hierarchical structures of narrative knowledge, vision and point of view to articulate issues of power and conflicts (or identities) of interest, are not In *Torpedo Run*, we know that the submarine commander who sends Barney on a mission to destroy the Japanese warship, *Shinaru*, is aware of the dangers this poses to Barney's wife and child (who are being taken to Japan in an accompanying ship, and who thus are being used by the *Shinaru* as protection). We know because we are witness to scenes in which this knowledge is displayed. We also know that the commander has a great deal of power (the power, for instance, to order Barney to follow the *Shinaru* in the first place). But we know, too, that he exercises his power with reason and care, and that he shares his knowledge (at least with fellow officers), because we witness his concern for Barney's wife and child, his awareness of Barney's

dilemma, and the fact that he reveals, rather than conceals, the knowledge he has *Torpedo Run* is thus like *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949) and *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1955) insofar as it constructs an identity of interests between officers and men, despite hardship and death to the latter, by giving its spectators access to the former's point of view – to the plausible and, in context, ultimately reasonable, motives and concerns that underlie their orders and actions.

In *Paths of Glory*, by contrast, we are given access, in the film's opening scene, and in the scenes which follow the failure of the attack on The Anthill, to motives and concerns which are anything but reasonable The interests of the men at the Front are the last thing on the minds of Broulard and Mireau *Paths of Glory* here is similar to films like *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *Play Dirty* (1969), *Tobruk* (1967) and *Attack!* (1956), all of which contain scenes in which representatives of command are shown making plans and giving orders which are both contrary to the interests of the men and, in the case of some of these films, at least, of little or no strategic or tactical value.

Issues of omniscience

These examples all suggest that the relative lack of knowledge and power of the lower ranks in war films is a widespread generic convention.[21] They also, perhaps, suggest that whether for the purpose of highlighting identities or discrepancies of interest between the lower ranks and those in command, the marking of these lacks tends to involve omniscient modes of narration – because it tends also to involve according the spectator access to knowledge the lower ranks do not possess

At this point, however, there is a need, on the one hand, to distinguish between different modes and aspects of omniscience and, on the other, to point to the existence of an alternative, perhaps less common, but equally appropriate tradition of narration in American war films. It is a need made all the more apparent by Gilbert Adair's comments on Oliver Stone's film, *Platoon* (1986)·

There is a democratic or egalitarian ambition in the idea of positioning the spectator's view at the level of the grunt's eye, so to speak. In war movies the spectator's place has always tended to be a privileged, on occasion impossible. vantage-point, shifting between a loftily detached overview of the field of conflict (i e. the commanding officer's view) and a direct headlong plunge into the melée (the grunt's view) Stone, however, rejects such a hierarchy. Just as, in the narrative. the American soldiers are depicted as having no longer much need of the officers (the only

officer of any consequence in the movie, the platoon's commander, Lieutenant Woolfe, played by Mark Moses, is an ineffectual college-boy milquetoast barely tolerated by the sergeants under him), so, in the auditorium, the spectator is denied the Olympian omniscience to which he has ever been accustomed.[22]

22 Gilbert Adair *Hollywood's Vietnam from* The Green Berets *to* Full Metal Jacket (London Heinemann 1989), p 148

While usefully seeking to address issues of narration in the war film, and while providing genuine insight into *Platoon*'s narrative style and ideological 'ambition', these comments seem to me to require qualification, precisely on the two counts mentioned above.

Firstly, the phrase 'Olympian omniscience' tends to conflate a number of different aspects of narration, and, in context at least, to imply the possibility of a simple correlation between ideological stance and narrative point of view. Omniscience is a function both of the range and of the depth of a narrative's knowledge of the story it tells, of the characters that story involves, and of the world in which the story takes place. As David Bordwell has pointed out, one of the principal indices of the range of a narrative's knowledge is what he calls 'spatial omnipresence': 'its ability to change view at will by cutting within a scene and crosscutting between various locales.'[23] Another is the extent to which the knowledge it presents to the spectator exceeds the knowledge possessed by any of the characters. Judged according to these criteria, a film like *Objective, Burma!*, for instance, is highly omniscient. As we have seen, its narrative moves back and forth between command, the men and the enemy – each of them, at any one point in time, centres only of partial knowledge – just as it moves back and forth between base, the jungle and the sky. However, if the knowledge possessed by the narrative in *Objective, Burma!* is consistently extensive in *range*, there are a number of significant points at which, as we have seen, it is much less extensive in *depth*. Thus although, unlike the Japanese and the men, we see Carter making decisions, and although, in each case, we know what they are, we do not always know whether the reasoning behind them is sound, or how far Carter feels genuine concern for the men, because we do not ever really know what goes on in his mind. In addition, and separately, we are uncertain, not only about Carter, but about command and its motives in general, because the film is crucially uncommunicative about the planned invasion of Burma. It is not quite clear, until the very end, if or when the invasion will take place, and how it will affect the fate of the men

23 David Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London Methuen 1985) p 161

Thus *Objective, Burma!* combines, and at times undermines, an omniscience at one level with, at another level, suppressions, limitations and withholdings of knowledge. It is this that helps to produce the film's ideological ambivalence, its hesitations about, rather than straightforward endorsements of, command and its

officers, and its concomitant (egalitarian?) stress on the uncertainties and sufferings of the men. Its omniscient aspects are in no way correlative with the point of view of command; indeed. they are essential to its ambivalence. Omniscience itself, meanwhile, is revealed by a film like this to be a rather more complex matter than Adair's comments would seem to imply.

This is relevant, in turn, to my second point. Adair's comments, it seems to me, tend to exaggerate the novelty of *Platoon*'s narrative style He seems unaware of an alternative tradition of narration in the war film, a tradition comprising a number of films which, like *Platoon*, tend to eschew aspects of omniscience, and which, like *Platoon*, do so in order to articulate, in distinct and particular ways, the issues of knowledge and power that are so central to the genre. Among the films within this tradition apart from *Platoon* (and the later *Hamburger Hill* [1987] and *Full Metal Jacket* [1987]), I would include *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *The Story of G I Joe* (1945), *A Walk in the Sun* (1946), *The Steel Helmet* (1951), *Fixed Bayonets* (1951), *Fear and Desire* (1953) and *The Big Red One* (1980)

A Walk in the Sun is perhaps the most extreme – and systematic – of these examples. It is therefore worth a brief discussion, in order to pinpoint more precisely the aspects of omniscience it lacks, and in order to gauge more exactly some of the ideological effects these lacks may have

A Walk in the Sun is about a platoon of American soldiers who land in Italy in World War II Having lost one officer (Lieutenant Rand), who is killed by a stray shell as the soldiers wait to disembark, and another (Sergeant Halverson) who disappears on landing, the platoon nevertheless makes its way towards what it understands to be the military target – a farmhouse in the countryside a few miles from the beach. On the way, led firstly by Sergeant Porter (Herbert Rudley), who later breaks down, then by Sergeant Tyne (Dana Andrews), the soldiers learn that Halverson has been killed. Strafed, from time to time, by German planes, they encounter some Italian deserters – from whom they ask directions – some German armoured vehicles – which they successfully attack – and an American scout on a motorbike – who promises to confirm the location of the farmhouse, but who never returns Finally, they themselves locate the farmhouse and, after one abortive attack, successfully take it

The basic feature of the narration of the film, *A Walk in the Sun*, as of the novel on which it is based, is the way it combines a communicative omniscience of depth with a very circumscribed narrative range.[24] We learn, through extensive conversation, and through the occasional interior monologue on the soundtrack (principally in the form of imaginary letters addressed to his sister by Windy [John Ireland], but also in the form of Tyne's thoughts as

25 The stylized nature of Robert
Rossen's dialogue for *A Walk in
the Sun* has often attracted
comment Kingsley Canham for
instance, notes that repetition,
catch phrases and obsessional
figures of speech produced an
effect of blank verse, the rhythm
of which heightened the sense
of fear and isolation Clive
Denton Kingsley Canham Tony
Thomas, *The Hollywood
Professionals vol 2, Henry King,
Lewis Milestone Sam Wood*
(London Tantivy Press 1974) p
95

they attack the farmhouse at the end) a great deal about what goes
on in the minds of the men. (All the more so as the conversations
are themselves as much interchanged monologues as instances of
two-way or three-way communication.)[25] But at no point do we
know more than the men; and the men, as the film insists
throughout, know very little Even though there is intermittent
voice-over narration on the soundtrack, and a kind of narrative
commentary in the form of a ballad (both of them hallmarks of
potential omniscience), the spectator is provided with little more
than basic expositional information (like the names of the men,
where they come from, where they are landing – information of the
kind that the men already possess). Indeed, just after the men have
landed, the voice over implicitly reiterates our own lack of
knowledge as it explicitly marks the extent to which the men lack
knowledge too·

> 'Things on that beach suddenly went quiet. The silence was bad,
> very bad. Was the enemy fifty miles away? Was he just behind the
> beach-head, watching? If the machine gun would only start up a
> man would know what to do. But a man can't fight in a vacuum '

As the narrative continues to refuse us access to actions and events
beyond the perception and knowledge of the men – as we, like the
men, wonder what has happened to Halverson, wonder about the
progress of the invasion, wonder when the next German plane will
appear to attack, wonder what happened to the scout – so the
dialogue and monologues become increasingly peppered with, and
increasingly foreground, the topic of knowledge:

> 'How long do you think Halverson'll take?'
> 'Shouldn't take much longer.'
> 'How do you know?'
> 'I know everything. What do you think they gave me the soldier's
> medal for?'

> 'What's eating him?'
> 'Don't you know?'

> 'We don't know any more than we did before.'
> 'Did you expect to?'

> 'There's some high ground with a farmhouse on it about three
> miles up ahead '
> 'Anything there?'
> 'Wish I knew '

'Where are you now?'
'Italy.'
'How do you know you're in Italy? Have you seen any signposts
in Italian?'
'We just landed in Italy '
'How do you know you landed in Italy? Just because somebody
told you? You believe everything you hear?'

As in *Objective, Burma!*, this foregrounding of knowledge is
accompanied by a foregrounding of the faculties and frailties of
hearing and vision At one point Tyne says 'I think I hear planes',
but there are none. 'I guess I was wrong.' Later on he tells Porter,
'Can't see the beach or the water. It's all stop. No shouting. No
firing No sound of motors. The war is over ' On the beach he tells
McWilliams, 'We've got a grandstand seat ' McWilliams replies,
'Yeah. The only trouble is you can't see nothin'. That's the whole
trouble with this war You never get to see nothin' '
   The net effect of these uncertainties, of this problematization of
knowledge, is to render nearly everything that happens to the men
both (relatively) surprising and (relatively) arbitrary As in those
war films with a greater range of narrative knowledge, stress is laid
on the limited nature of the power of the men, the extent to which
they are at the mercy of forces beyond their control. In contrast to
such films, though, these forces remain more or less anonymous,
more or less impersonal. Because the narrative allows neither the
spectator nor the men themselves access to any identifiable causal
agents with the power to determine (and therefore motivate) many
of the events that take place, the sense is created that even if such
agents exist, they cannot be known. To that extent, though, and
again in contrast to more omniscient films, they cannot therefore be
held accountable: in *A Walk in the Sun*, neither command (as in
Paths of Glory), nor the enemy (as in *Torpedo Run*), nor a mixture
of the two (as in *Objective, Burma!*), are marked as really
responsible for what happens to the men.

These characteristics are not confined to *A Walk in the Sun*. They
are typical of war films with a narrative mode of limited
omniscience. There are one or two further points worth making,
both about the characteristics and the films. These will then lead on
to some concluding comments about the issues of masculinity and
fantasy.
   The first point is that 'non-omniscient' war films can vary
considerably in narrative structure, and hence in how, within the
limits laid down by their mode of narration, they finally articulate,
and, in particular, resolve, the issues of power that they raise In *A
Walk in the Sun*, despite all the uncertainties, obstacles and

problems, the men eventually reach, and take, the farmhouse They eventually achieve a clear-cut, military goal In doing so, they gain a degree of power – a degree of control over their own destiny, a degree of influence over the course of events. In films like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Platoon*, there is no single, overarching military goal: the narrative is much more episodic The goal in these instances – and the index of any gain in autonomy, of any gain in power – becomes, simply, survival. In *Platoon* it is achieved, in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, it is not

Whatever the outcome, and this is my second point, the extent to which command and its officers either remain or become 'an irrelevance', to use Adair's phrase, is important For it means that if, on the one hand, goals are achieved and power thereby gained, they are achieved and gained without the aid of – and on occasion even despite – command And it means that if, on the other hand, the reverse is the case, command is not, specifically, to blame.

This leads on to a third point Arguably central to the war film – in the main, quite clearly, a form of 'masculine romance'[26] – is a 'typically masculine' fantasy scenario focused on a struggle for power and control by violent means in violent circumstances.[27] Such a scenario almost inevitably involves 'typically masculine' Oedipal dramas, dilemmas and conflicts. The 'irrelevance' of command in the war films within this particular tradition tends to mean, as we shall see, that these dramas, dilemmas and conflicts are handled in distinct and particular ways.

Masculinity and fantasy

In the chapter entitled 'Men at war' in his book, *What a Man's Gotta Do*, Antony Easthope outlines four basic structural and iconographic aspects to representations of war, and argues their correspondence to four basic aspects of masculinity as psychoanalytically conceived

> As a masculine form in the dominant culture, war, whether in novels, films, or elsewhere, is structured round four crucial moments, defeat, combat, victory, and comradeship Four traditional photographic images correspond to these One is the horror of war, whether it is represented by the nightmare of the Somme, the ruins of Hiroshima, or, as in *The Deer Hunter* at one point, by the squeaking of innumerable wheelchairs The second is combat – fighter aircraft and contrails in the Battle of Britain, marines on the beach at Okinawa. Thirdly, there is the moment of victory, when the symbolic sons win an accolade from the father, riding in tanks through cheering Paris, having medals pinned on at the Kremlin And, associated with all the others, there is the

26 I owe the phrase 'masculine romance' to Janet Batseeler Tony Davies, Rebecca O Rourke and Chris Weedon *Rewriting English Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London Methuen, 1985) pp 70–4 It should at this point be noted that there do exist one or two American war films which centre on female characters most notably perhaps, *Cry Havoc* (1943) and *So Proudly We Hail* (1943) For discussion of these films and others see M Joyce Baker *Images of Women in Film The War Years 1941–1945* (Ann Arbor U M I Research Press 1980), pp 111–27 Basinger *The World War II Combat Film* pp 223–43, and Michael Renov *Hollywood s Wartime Women Representation and Ideology* (Ann Arbor U M I Research Press 1988) pp 120–7

27 I would not want to claim that this scenario is exclusive to the war film It clearly also applies to other forms of masculine romance like the Western and the gangster film I would claim though that the institutionalized and hierarchical nature of military authority as depicted in the war film tends to focus the issues of knowledge and power, discussed above, and the Oedipal issues discussed below with particular insistence

moment of comradeship, the picture of the soldier weeping for the fallen, comforting his wounded buddy. For psychoanalysis these moments or images are to be explained in terms of the fear of castration, the triumph of the masculine ego, fathers and sons, and the sublimated intimacies of the male bond.[28]

28 Easthope *What a Man's Gotta Do*, p 63

I would like to place this passage alongside two further quotations. The first is from an article by Susan Jeffords, the second from an article by Claudia Springer Both refer specifically to recent war films set in Vietnam But both make important points about the articulation of issues of masculinity, and the role within that articulation of combat scenes in particular: points that, alongside those of Easthope, offer a useful theoretical paradigm within which to consider the war film more generally. Here, then, firstly, is Jeffords:

> The combat film is, first and foremost, a film not simply about men but about the construction of the masculine subject, and the combat sequence – or, more generally, scenes of violence in combat films, whether as fighting in battle, torture, prison escapes, or explosions – is the point of excess, not only for the filmic narrative, but for masculine subjectivity . . Combat sequences are produced by and relieve moments of crisis in the construction of the masculine subject, and function narratively to enable exchanges of power within and between the father/son dynamic that stabilizes that subject.[29]

29 Jeffords, 'Masculinity as excess in Vietnam films', p 489

Springer reiterates Jeffords's basic thesis, while adding a specific modification of her own:

> Vietnam combat films, then, Jeffords argues, create desire by opening a gap that they subsequently fill with a new, more stable father
> What complicates them is that by opening a gap, they also escape the constraints of paternal responsibility and construct a desire for rebellion .. The son eventually chooses aspects of several paternal roles . . to develop his own paternal role models [Springer here is referring specifically to films like *Platoon* and *Rambo First Blood, Part II* (1985), and differentiating Vietnam films from films set in World War II], but the narrative nonetheless delays his assumption of power to let him run amok Both the narrative sequences and combat scenes participate in creating the dual desires of authority and rebellion [30]

30 Springer, 'Rebellious sons', pp 517–18

The first thing to say about the theses put forward in each of these quotes is that they are all, I think, to some degree reductive. War films, combat scenes, the dominant structural moments in representations of war are not *just* 'about' masculinity. They are, or can be, also 'about' wars, warfare, technology, ethnicity, national policy, national ideals and so on Unless these in turn are viewed

solely as the expressions of some essential masculinity, they must to some extent count as appropriate areas of generic concern in their own right. Nevertheless, masculinity is clearly an important element in the war film, just as the war film is clearly important in the formation and dissemination of images and versions of masculinity itself In this respect, the real interest of these theses is that they focus on generic and narrative structures, rather than on isolated images, characters and scenes.

All three quotes speak of fathers and sons, hence, implicitly or explicitly, of a particular Oedipal relationship, and the particular Oedipal wishes, anxieties and tensions, and patterns of resolution and conflict, to which it gives rise These factors are of particular relevance, I would argue, to the topic of relations between command and 'the men', especially insofar as these relations involve issues of authority, autonomy and power, and especially insofar as they are placed within a context of conflict.

Objective, Burma!, for instance, can from this perspective be seen as a film which pushes the Oedipal tensions inherent in these relations to the limit. Initially under the guidance and protection of command, the men are thrust, on their own, into an increasingly hostile and dangerous environment. When things start to go wrong, they begin to worry whether they will be, or have been abandoned They are then left to fend for themselves as they seek to follow instructions whose rationale they increasingly doubt and whose relevance and benefit to them is increasingly unclear. The condition of quasi-autonomy into which they are forced is accompanied, not by growing self-confidence, or the accumulation of a power of their own, but by doubt, uncertainty, loss of life, and the increasing realization that they are at the mercy of powerful forces, some of them vehemently hostile, over which they have little control. At the end, their powerful protector comes to their aid, and they are finally able to overcome their hostile antagonists. But even here, as we have seen, there is considerable ambivalence, and the overall effect of the ending is to register the precariousness of the position of the men, the extent to which they are ultimately dependent upon an authority whose power is far greater than their own

Objective, Burma!, then, stages a fantasy scenario in which the polarities of a father-like authority and power, on the one hand, and a quasi-infantile helplessness, on the other, are explored to the full Bearing the theses of Easthope, Jeffords and Springer in mind, though, it is important to point out three things: here, at any rate, the sons do not win accolades from the father (or fathers); the father (or fathers) and the sons do not exchange power; and while the sons may harbour 'rebellious' thoughts, those thoughts are motivated, not by a wish to usurp the father's position or challenge his power, but by a wish to restore his protection. Far from running amok, the men evade opportunities for combat, far from asserting

their independence, they seek the comfort and safety of home. What all this suggests, I think, is that Oedipal fantasies and tensions are clearly involved in war films, but that there is no set pattern to the way they are stated and resolved.

A similar point applies to combat sequences. In *Objective, Burma!*, the combat sequences all occur at points which mark shifts in the relations between command and the men. From the easy and painless taking of the radar station at the beginning, to the final, nightmarish confrontation with the Japanese in the dark, they trace a deterioration in these relations: increasing uncertainties on the part of the men about the intentions and wisdom of command, increasing difficulties in communication; and an increasing inability on the part of command to protect the men from danger Thus they do indeed help mark 'moments of crisis' in the film's Oedipal scenario However, since, as we have seen, that scenario is based neither on an exchange of Oedipal power, nor on rebellion, it might be more accurate to say that in the war film as a whole such sequences function, not to stage unvarying modes of Oedipal tension, but to stage modes of tension specific to individual films and, perhaps, cycles of films

A Walk in the Sun provides further evidence for this last point, while indicating also, in some of the ways its Oedipal scenario contrasts with that of *Objective, Burma!*, that there may be systematic links between Oedipal patterns and modes of narration. The combat sequences in *A Walk in the Sun*, unlike those in *Objective, Burma!*, chart the stages in an accumulation of power and control by the men. Bombarded by shells as they wait to land, strafed by a plane as they wait near the beach, they are initially unsure as to the whereabouts of their target and as to what they should do They do not know what is happening around them and they are vulnerable to enemy attack. Later on, however, they do mount two successful attacks themselves, one on the convoy of enemy vehicles, and the other, of course, on the farmhouse At the same time, these sequences chart – and articulate – moments of crisis and change in leadership: Lieutenant Rand is killed in the initial bombardment, Sergeant Halverson at some point during the landing. Still vulnerable under Porter's command, it is not until Porter breaks down and Tyne takes charge, just before the attack on the convoy, that the men's fortunes begin to improve· it is then that the men themselves begin to acquire more knowledge, more power, and more control over their destiny It is under Tyne's leadership that they reach and take the farmhouse, and under Tyne's leadership that they win the film's last battle and thus achieve their goal

In *A Walk in the Sun*, then, unlike *Objective, Burma!*, combat sequences do mark exchanges in leadership and power. But these exchanges take place among the men themselves If Oedipal wishes

and tensions are at stake, they are focused, not on High Command, as they are in *Objective, Burma!*, but on leaders internal to the group One of the reasons for this – part consequence, part cause – is that in *A Walk in the Sun*, in contrast to *Objective, Burma!*, High Command is beyond the range – hence the 'consciousness' – of the film's mode of narration In both respects *A Walk in the Sun* is like *Platoon*: just as both films, as we have already seen, eschew an omniscience of narrative range, so both films focus their Oedipal tensions, crises and fantasies on internal, rather than external, leaders and leadership – on sergeants and lieutenants rather than on brigadiers and generals [31]

While I would not want to generalize too much on the basis of a handful of examples, I would, in conclusion, propose the relationship between Oedipal patterns and modes of narration in the war film as a topic for further research

In *Narration and the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell writes as follows

> We should not expect any film to adhere to a single pitch of knowledge or self-consciousness or communicativeness There will be shifts between omniscience and restriction, greater and lesser self-consciousness, more or less suppressive narration [32]

He goes on to suggest that different genres conventionalize in different ways 'the patterns and purposes' involved in these shifts [33] In this article, I have tried to show how in the war film such patterns are related to the purposes of highlighting issues of knowledge and power, and of articulating markedly 'masculine' fantasy scenarios. I have in the process tried also to show that formal and ideological issues are interwoven, and that it is therefore possible to bring formal, ideological and psychoanalytic concepts and analysis fruitfully to bear on one another

31 For a discussion of *Platoon* s Oedipal issues see Easthope *What a Man's Gotta Do* pp 44–5

32 Bordwell *Narration in The Fiction Film* p 73

33 Ibid

The authorial text and postmodernism: Hitchcock's *Blackmail*

SELIM EYÜBOĞLU

Blackmail (All frame
enlargements appear by
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Entertainment)

This essay will explore the structure of enunciation and narrative signification in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929)[1] pointing out particularly the way in which the subject of the author interacts with the narration. One of the most distinctive aspects of *Blackmail*'s narration is its 'workings' within various discourses of modernism These workings take place on two levels. At the first level, *Blackmail* reflects certain modernist trends more or less contemporary with the film itself Here, *Blackmail* simply exhibits various aspects – most notably expressionism, the use of montage and self-reflexivity – associated with modernist form At the second level, however, these modernist aspects become the object of a second level of representation which is no longer a matter of mere reflection or imitation, but has to do with the narrating of the work as a modernist text. At this level, the modernist elements of the film go beyond simple mimicry and interact with the story as a principle of its narration. This interaction, however, is not confined to the service of the story as in the case of 'classical narrative texts', as described by Colin MacCabe.[2] On the contrary, these modernist devices interfere with the continuity of the story in order to multiply the discourses. In this respect, the use of montage in the scene where Alice tries to slice the bread, as well as the looping of the word 'knife' after it has been uttered by her neighbour, not only 'expressionistically' underlines Alice's turbulent state, but also foregrounds the enunciative function of the discourse Similarly, the

expressionistic shadow lighting at the scene of the rape attempt both represents the violence of the action descriptively and reflects the presence of narrating as a different voice from that of the story event.

My argument is that, instead of quoting modernist devices borrowed from other trends, *Blackmail* employs such elements in order to search for an alternative narrating. For though *Blackmail* might seem similar to other modernist texts in terms of its foregrounded discourses, the film in fact selfconsciously divorces itself from the aim for originality and uniqueness which is of course one of the characteristics of modernist representation Instead of following modernist texts as the established forms of representations, *Blackmail* seeks new ways of representation via modernism. This crucial side-stepping from modernism suggests a new position in representation which goes beyond modernism. While modernist trends problematize their own representations, for example by foregrounding the presentness of their own discourses and aiming at a subversion of the classical norms of representation, these same trends inevitably establish their own norms. The self-awareness of the limits of being modern, I would suggest, causes the discourse of *Blackmail* to be post-modern. This postmodernity, however, is not the successor of modernism. On the contrary, *Blackmail* forms a discourse which was once sought by modernism In other words, what modernism fails to achieve is what *Blackmail* achieves without being modern With some approximation, this particular position of *Blackmail* can be seen within the context of Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism. According to Lyotard, postmodern texts '   are not in principle governed by the pre-established rules, and they can not be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work '[3] In a postmodern work, as Lyotard suggests, those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for Similarly *Blackmail* goes beyond the peripheries of modernism and constructs a discourse where the established norms of modern trends can no longer remain as the criteria for judgement The paradoxical position of *Blackmail*'s being both inside and outside modernism at the same time suggests a break from modernist representation for which subversion of the classical becomes the rule Whereas Lyotard theorizes the postmodern as a work which formulates the rules of what will have been done, the discourse of *Blackmail* reverses this process and rules out what has been established by modernism as a rule by revisiting it at a point where it seems to have lost its subversive function

Seeing *Blackmail* within this context already suggests Hitchcock as a subject of the discourse rather than as an autonomous agent/artist. The awareness of modernism as an already established form of representation places his narrating as a parody of modernism The

3   Jean François Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota University of Minnesota Press 1984) p 84

4 Fredric Jameson
'Postmodernism, or the cultural
logic of late capitalism *New
Left Review,* no 146 (1984), p
64

text selfconsciously allies itself with institutionalized forms of representation rather than attacking them Additionally, the growing awareness of the limitations of the subject as the author, along with the increasing unavailability of the individual style, to use Fredric Jameson's description, results in the subject/author parodying his/her own modernist position [4] Selfconscious parody in modernism becomes conscious self-parody in postmodern texts. At the textual level, *Blackmail* implies the self-destructive position of its modernist subject. Hitchcock's relationship with the film suggests a new consciousness of a subject/artist divorced from modernism My approach to Hitchcock's narrating is twofold I will try to locate the role of Hitchcock's authorial discourse as a disappearance; while trying, at the same time, to formulate the system of exchange between the artistic treatment and the self-propelling narration in absence of its author as that of a postmodern discourse

In order to approach the function of the subject in relation to his/her utterance as part of a given discourse, I will employ Emile Benveniste's concept of enunciation [5] The action of enunciation is seen here through Lacan's notion of subjectivity on two levels: first, the subject of enunciation and second, the subject of the enounced. As Lacan suggests, the enunciating subject and the subject of its enunciation are never one and the same thing The gap is the result of the oscillation between the enunciation of the self and the discourse of the other [6] Within this context, the relinquishment of modernist self-reflexivity not only rules out the role of the subject as author, but also puts the subject into a new position, where he/she enunciates through the discourse of the other beyond his/her control.

5 Emile Benveniste, *General
Linguistics* (Miami University of
Miami Press 1966) pp 205–17

6 Jacques Lacan *Ecrits* (London
Tavistock Publications, 1985) pp
30–114

At this point, I shall examine the discursive layers of *Blackmail* such as the fabula, the narrative and the story in relation to the enunciation of the text. I will try to elaborate on the previously mentioned new position of the subject in the discourse of the other which then, becomes the subject of the text Seen through this position, the subject as the other and the other as the subject in oscillation produce the text In order to facilitate my later discussion I will give a summary of the film.

Blackmail *is the story of a relationship between a shopkeeper's daughter, Alice White (Anny Ondra), and a Scotland Yard detective, Frank Webber (John Longden), who are blackmailed in connection with a murder case The film opens with a raid by Scotland Yard's flying squad which introduces Frank, one of the Scotland Yard detectives The raid ends with the arrest of a criminal Following this sequence, Frank meets his girlfriend Alice at the police station Alice is angry with Frank because he is late for their appointment They take a tube train (which is the occasion of Hitchcock's*

appearance) and are then seen arriving at a large tea-room Throughout the tea-room scene Alice deliberately keeps quarrelling with Frank, trying to get more attention from him When she fails, Alice decides to keep an assignation she has arranged tentatively with an artist named Crewe (Cyril Ritchard), and turns down Frank's proposal to see a detective film about Scotland Yard She hesitates because Crewe has not appeared yet, changes her mind several times and finally rejects Frank's offer upon seeing Crewe Exasperated with Alice, Frank leaves in spite of her efforts to calm him down, he then regrets it and goes back, just in time to see her leaving with Crewe As Crewe walks her home, he persuades Alice to come up to his studio In the meantime an unknown man tries to eavesdrop on their conversation in the street Alice feels apprehensive about her assignation From Crewe's apartment, she looks down at the street where she sees a passing policeman She looks at a picture of a jester, painted by Crewe, and laughs at it As she looks around she finds Crewe's palette and asks him to teach her painting When she paints a face on the canvas Crewe helps her to complete it with a female nude Being encouraged by Alice's desire to appear as one of his models he persuades her to put on a ballet dress While she takes off her dress behind the screen and puts on the ballet dress, Crewe plays the piano and sings Being seduced by Alice's new appearance as well as by her cheerfulness, he tries to kiss Alice Realizing she has gone too far, she struggles against him and decides to leave While she takes off the ballet dress behind the screen Crewe pulls her own dress over the screen and continues to sing She tries to get it but Crewe drags her to his bed where he tries to rape her During the struggle, she finds a kitchen knife near the bedside and stabs him to death In a state of shock, Alice gets rid of any possible evidence, crosses her signature from the painting which she has made with Crewe and finally leaves the place On the way home, she wanders around for several hours through central London She hallucinates and sees the neon cocktail shaker in a Gordon's 'White Purity' hoarding dissolving into a stabbing knife Alice finally arrives home and sneaks into her bed just before her mother comes to wake her

Meanwhile, Scotland Yard is informed of the murder by Crewe's landlady, and Frank, assigned to the case, recognizes Alice's glove at the scene of the crime Hiding the glove from the other detectives, he immediately visits her father's shop where the family also lives and talks to Alice privately inside the glass telephone booth in the shop Soon after Frank shows the glove to Alice, a stranger called Tracy (Donald Calthrop) intrudes upon their conversation He pulls the glove from Frank's pocket and tells Frank that he has the other glove Confident that his blackmail attempt will succeed, Tracy invites himself to breakfast with Alice's confused parents However, when Frank finds out that Tracy was seen by Crewe's landlady the night before, and thus becomes the chief suspect, the tables are turned and he begins to threaten him – in spite of Alice's protest In panic, Tracy escapes and there follows a classic chase scene which results in him falling to his death through the roof of the British Museum Meanwhile, Alice writes a note declaring her intention to confess since she cannot allow an innocent man to suffer because of what she has done When she arrives at the office of the Chief Inspector's room, she finds

Frank with the Inspector and before she makes her confession, the telephone rings The Inspector tells him to handle the matter and Frank takes Alice away At the counter, the same uniformed police officer who had previously whispered a joke in Alice's ear, advises Frank to be careful, otherwise he could lose his job to a lady detective (Alice) As she tries to join their laughter, her expression freezes and the last shot of the film shows what Alice sees the picture of the laughing jester which had been in Crewe's studio, pointing at her

I would like to approach both the artistic treatment and the self-reflexivity of the text from the viewpoint of the structure of enunciation. As Roland Barthes suggests in *Writing Degree Zero*, 'Style points to the living person who authors the text' [7] In contrast to narrating past events as *histoire*, to use Emile Benveniste's term, modernist texts reflect their author's desire to foreground their personal style Hence foregrounding a personal style emphasizes an implied author present in the text Such foregrounding can be seen in *Blackmail* where the enlarged shadows of Alice and Crewe are linked to the style of Hitchcock The dramatic effect of these shadows serves the narration and the description of the diegetic events as well as the self-referentiality of the scene. This self-referential aspect of the scene has an excess value since it has no diegetic function I would argue that the effect of the shot is due to the appearance of 'artistic style' (expressionism). In Benveniste's terms this kind of treatment can be considered as the discourse of the text. Whereas history is written, discourse marks itself as spoken by someone in an illusion of presence. As a text which is already written, history cannot mark its narrator. Benveniste's notion of *discours* and *histoire* is based on his distinction of the terms of French tenses the difference between the perfect and the aorist (simple past tense) is that the first one establishes a link between past events and the present in which one refers to the event, whereas the aorist completely separates past and present Benveniste argues that certain grammatical functions like the first pronoun 'I' and its implicit 'you', the adverbial shifters such as 'here', 'now', 'yesterday', 'today', 'tomorrow', and finally, certain tenses of the verb like the imperfect, imperfect anterior or the future, are confined to the discourse, while narrative in the strict sense is marked by the use of the third person and by tenses like the aorist and pluperfect As Benveniste formulates·

> Like the present tense, the perfect belongs to the linguistic system of discourse, *since its temporal reference is the moment of speech*, whereas the reference of the aorist is to the moment of event [8]

Benveniste further distinguishes forms which contain reference to the moment of enunciation and forms which do not First and second person pronouns take part in the *discours* since their

7 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York Hill and Wang, 1968) p 11

8 Emile Benveniste The correlations of tense in the French verb translated and quoted by Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca Cornell University Press 1975) p 197

9 Ibid p 198

10 Emile Benveniste *General Linguistics* p 207

11 Nick Browne, 'The spectator in-the-text the rhetoric of *Stagecoach*, *Film Quarterly* vol 30 no 1 (1976), pp 26–31

utterances are included in their speech. When a narrative is told in the aorist tense, as Benveniste shows in a passage from Balzac's *Gambora*, the text excludes the narrator. As Benveniste points out: 'In truth there is no longer even a narrator. No one speaks here, events seem to tell themselves'.[9] During the presentation of the facts by the observer, there is no intervention of the speaker in the recounting. In French, *histoire* means both history and story, and both prose fiction and historical writing apply to Benveniste's principal example of *histoire*. Finally, Benveniste defines *discours* as 'every enunciation assuming a speaker and hearer, and in the speaker the intention of influencing the hearer some way'.[10]

Using this approach, I will try to show the way in which the process of enunciation is closely linked to the artistic treatment as well as to the self-reflexivity of the text One can see that Benveniste's notion of discourse covers the role of author/narrator as the enunciator of the text The enunciation of the author, in other words, becomes the discourse of the text. Within this context, I will take Benveniste's approach one step further and suggest that the enunciative aspect of a text remains the first condition for a modernist text. The text not only reflects the presence of its author, but the process of its own enunciation as well. In order to define this particular process of authorial discourse, I will suggest the term 'double enunciation' In this regard, the first representation can only be read as part of a larger system by the establishment of the second level representation. Likewise, the self-reflexivity of a given text both activates the sign of enunciation as the first representation and, in addition, foregrounds this enunciation as process. Without this second representation, any letter written in the first person pronoun would be considered as a modernist text. However it should be noted that only the foregrounding of the enunciation process marks the authorial treatment of the text In his essay, 'The spectator-in-the-text: the rhetoric of *Stagecoach*', Nick Browne suggests that each camera set-up is an enunciation because each shot shows the scene from a different point, establishing a view [11] Each set up relates both geographically and in the logic of its connection to the action of the fiction In the scene from *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) which Browne analyzes, when Ringo Kid unwittingly invites the prostitute to join her disapproving social superiors at the table for lunch, the camera shifts back and forth from reflecting a general view to reflecting the personal views of certain characters. This shift between two views marks the authorial presence of the filmmaker as ironical Thus, the discourse of *Stagecoach* remains hostile to Lucy by showing Dallas from her (Lucy's) disapproving point of view. The enunciative act thus gives an alternative view of a gesture, commenting on the first representation The authorial treatment in *Stagecoach*, however, remains at the level of the first enunciation since the shifts between the camera set-ups only refer to the interpretation of the author

without making *its authorial treatment self-reflexive. This example* helps us to distinguish the first level of enunciation which does not necessarily mark the text as self-reflexive, and the second level of enunciation which is the basic category of a modernist discourse. While modernist texts emphasize the role of a unified subject as the author of the text, *Blackmail* moves away from this modernist discourse. In *Blackmail* the second enunciation juxtaposes its authorial discourse with other extra-textual discourses. When this juxtaposition occurs, the text enunciates itself through the channels of extra-textual discourses This particular process in *Blackmail* can be shown through the analysis of the three layers of the text. namely the fabula, the diegesis and the narrative

Mieke Bal defines the fabula as a series of logically- and chronologically-related events that are caused or experienced by actors [12] A fabula is the precondition of the diegesis A fabula that has been ordered in to a diegesis, however, is still not a text. Only the interaction of the fabula, the diegesis and the narrative construct the text. As opposed to the fabula, Bal distinguishes the diegesis (or story in Bal's usage) thus:

12 Mieke Bal *Narratology* (Toronto and London University of Toronto Press 1985)

> A story does not consist of material different from that of the fabula, but that this material is looked at from a certain, specific angle If one regards fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of that ordering.[13]

13 Ibid , p 49

The series of fabula events are independent of both the story and the medium The same fabula can be used in different stories. The most obvious example of this usage is in remakes. While *High Noon* (Zinneman, 1952) and *Outland* (Hyams, 1981) share a similar fabula, they represent two different stories and genres. The fabula events establish all the logical relationships of disjunction, conjunction, exclusion and inclusion and most frequently and importantly, causality – a causality which works within the network of consequences, conditions of existence and motivations. In *Blackmail*, Alice's assignation with Crewe, Crewe's rape attempt, her stabbing Crewe to death and Frank's finding of Alice's glove are the *consequences* of the fabula events, while Tracy's being nearby Crewe's apartment during the assignation is a *condition of existence* If Tracy as an actant did not happen to be nearby Crewe's apartment, he would not be able to play his role as a blackmailer, thus the causality of the fabula events would suffer. Similarly, if Crewe's landlady did not see Tracy and report it to Scotland Yard he would not become the prime suspect. The condition of existence, in other words, works as a pretext which carries events from one state to another Finally, Frank's hiding Alice's glove from the other detectives, and Tracy's use of the second glove are the *motivations* of the plot Motivation in relation to blackmailing is the only

position which links the plot and the narrative. I will return to this
point during my approach to narrative.

A central aspect of *Blackmail*'s fabula is the way the filmic
narrating employs a particular system of looks among its characters
according to their positions based on the fabula. This system of
looks corresponds to three levels of the fabula construction, namely,
the observation, the interpretation, and, finally, the blackmailing. It
should be noted that the events such as Frank's finding of Alice's
glove in Crewe's studio, Tracy's finding the second glove which
allows his blackmailing attempt, and Frank's blackmailing of Tracy
have no necessary significance in themselves but their significance is
established in the system of looks. It is this system of looks, together
with the superior knowledge of certain characters in relation to
others, which is the central mode for the motivation.

As will be discussed later it is the narration which establishes the
significance of *Blackmail*'s fabula organization. The exploitation of
the evidence in the murder case by Tracy and Frank is constructed
through the motivation of the character's interpretation. During this
process of interpretation, which is based on a system of looks, each
character uses his or her privileged position against the other. Peter
Wollen has pointed to this system of looks in a discussion which is
based on both Jacques Lacan's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's *The
Purloined Letter* and Roland Barthes's notion of the hermeneutic
code.[14] Barthes's formulation of the hermeneutic code is based on
three levels: on the first level an enigma has to be described,

14 Peter Wollen, 'The hermeneutic
code', *Readings and Writings*
(London Verso. 1982)

15 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York Hill and Wang 1974)

distinguished and formulated; at the second level, this enigma has to be held in suspense; and, finally, at the third level, it has to be solved and disclosed [15] Wollen's formulation of Hitchcock's narration draws upon Barthes's elaboration of the three levels of the hermeneutic code, describing them in terms of three looks, namely seeing, interpreting and knowing The three looks as Wollen describes them are

> (1) A look that sees nothing; (2) a look which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides and (3) a look which sees that the first two looks leave what should be hidden exposed to whomsoever would seize it, 'the second believing itself invisible because the first has its head in the ground, and all the while letting the third calmly pluck its rear', as Lacan puts it.[16]

16 Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings* p 42

Alice's look is the first look which sees nothing. After stabbing Crewe to death, she tries to destroy all the evidence of the murder However, she underestimates the possible observation of other people, and, more importantly, she leaves her gloves behind. Frank's look, on the other hand, is the second look, for when he finds Alice's glove, he knows that Alice knows nothing about his knowledge of her involvement in the murder case, but by overlooking the possibility that the second glove might have been found by someone else, he overestimates the privilege of his knowledge. The consequences of Tracy being nearby Crewe's apartment, hearing Alice's cry and finally getting inside to see what has happened makes him the person of the third look. Tracy's knowledge of the whole situation appears in two steps. When he finds the second glove, he only sees what Alice does not see His picture of the murder only completes itself when he sees Frank showing the other glove privately in the telephone booth At this stage, Tracy also knows that Frank is ignorant of his knowledge This application of Wollen's model suggests that all the events are narrated according to the consequential logic of the fabula. While the hermeneutic process narrates its fabula events according to the conventions of the hermeneutic code, the text rules out the possibility of an external observer's narration Indeed, the closed universe of this hermeneutic process introduces an enigma, holds it in suspense and discloses itself through the hierarchical looks of its characters. The exclusion of a diegetic narrator, I will suggest, is the result of *Blackmail's* narration in *histoire* mode. In Benveniste's terms, no one narrates the story Events of the fabula simply happen according to their diegetic logic My argument here, then, has denied a direct Hitchcockian authorial discourse.

Hitchcock's films, however, are noted precisely for the appearance of the director – in some sense proclaiming himself as the author – and *Blackmail* is no exception to this. On the underground train

which Frank and Alice take to go to a tea-room for their appointment, Hitchcock appears *sitting on a seat at right angles to Frank's*. A little boy first plays with Hitchcock's hat, then Frank's, and finally attempts to play with Hitchcock's hat once again. He changes his mind, however, after seeing Hitchcock's angry face. It is crucial for my argument to note that, in this instance, while Hitchcock marks the presence of his authorial discourse, it is not the same as that unified subject as 'author of the text' which Raymond Bellour suggests in his reading of Hitchcock's *Marnie*:

> Thus in *Marnie*, what Hitchcock sees or imagines (in the same way as Mark or Strutt, but this time as her next door neighbor in a hotel) is what we see: this same woman, still seen from the back, but wearing a robe, progressive focalisation of the voyeuristic impulse.[17]

17 Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock, the enunciator', *Camera Obscura*, no. 2 (1977), pp. 78–9

Bellour's example suggests that Hitchcock's appearance as the familiar signature of the film's director not only inserts a self-reflexive element into the film, but also establishes a system of looks in which Hitchcock shares the voyeuristic look both of the male character, Mark or Strutt in *Marnie* (1964), and of the spectator. As Bellour formulates this system of looks:

> A new level of intensity is reached in the system of signature, when, from being symbolic included in the logic of phantasy, it

18 Ibid p 78

can assume a specific position in the cinematographic apparatus whereby it asserts itself as enunciation: representation in the scene, in the axis of that which gives it substance, i.e., the look of that camera.[18]

Hitchcock's appearance in *Blackmail*, however, does not establish an enunciative function of the look. First of all, Hitchcock's seated position does not allow him to see what Frank sees More importantly, the particular mise-en-scene does not inscribe Hitchcock in the chain of the look The difference between Hitchcock's position in *Marnie* and that in *Blackmail* is based on a crucial difference between *Marnie* and *Blackmail* in terms of their fabula organizations

In *Marnie*, the desired object of the filmic text – Marnie – is not accessible to the characters Though she is held within the system of their looks, she is not physically present to them· they are in an office, she is elsewhere. Due to the consequential logic of the fabula Marnie is kept absent because of her robbery. There is, however, a resemblance between her diegetic status as an elusive *dramatis persona* and her representation by the discourse Her absence and presence in the text, I suggest, works within the dialectic of two opposing or reversible elements. This dialectic proceeds through the absence and presence, or accessibility and inaccessibility of the desired object· Marnie's body In other words, the desired object of the text is not only Marnie as the *dramatis persona* of the story, but her elusiveness at the level of the representation as well. To sum up, there is an immanent desire in representation which economizes the appearance of the central element or the *dramatis persona* of the narrative This economization, or even absenting, of the desired object, however, undergoes a process of assimilation and represents itself through the diegesis In short, the restricted representation of a desire object in narrative and its diegetic counterpart coexist as recto and verso. This dialectic play between desire and absence is formulated by Sandy Flitterman as:

> The absence of the object is the condition of desire; here the structure of fantasy crystallizes around the desire for the woman–image Desire here is understood not as a relation to the real object independent of a subject, but as a relation to a representation [19]

19 Sandy Flitterman 'Woman, desire and the look feminism and the enunciative apparatus in cinema in John Caughie (ed) *Theories of Authorship* (London BFI/Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981) p 246

Desire for Alice in *Blackmail*, however, is not based on her absence On the contrary, her entrapped presence serves to produce a different kind of desire: the desire for the surveillance, control, blackmail and silencing of women Unlike Marnie, Alice regrets that in her crime she has gone too far. In *Blackmail*, Alice's self-conscious social guilt is taken for granted for the sake of the closure of the text As I will discuss further, Hitchcock's intervention in

Blackmail is not based on the optical point of view shared by Hitchcock and Mark Rutland as in the case of *Marnie*. This exclusion from the chain of the look means that he is not an enunciator in Bellour's sense but rather suggests another system of enunciation in which Hitchcock can be related to Frank and Alice. The timing of the appearance is a strategic one. He chooses to appear in the last scene before the diegetic conflict begins. Once the conflict, Alice's assignation, the murder and the blackmailing begin, Hitchcock leaves the text. In other words, his final detachment from the game marks his explicit distinction from the other characters. It could be said that in *Marnie* also, where Hitchcock retreats into his room, he is also retiring from the system of looks set up between himself and the spectator. His withdrawal from the text parodies his authorial position in the text. Through his enunciative appearance, Hitchcock shows his desire to see the subsequent events of the narrative. His position is similar to the laughing jester who points at Alice, but the jester functions in the intra-diegetic space of the text while Hitchcock enunciates from the extra-diegetic space.

If we move from the discussion of the link between the system of the look and the fabula organization to the narrative, we can see the narrative structure of *Blackmail* as the confrontation between order and disorder. Disorder is Alice's assignation, the murder and, finally, the blackmailing. Order is the elimination of the blackmailer at any cost, as well as the return of Alice as a silenced object. The

transformation from the unbalanced state of events back to a new order is the direction of any narrative. In this way, the narrative orders the diegetic events as well as the fabula. If fabula is a series of logically and chronologically ordered events, the narrative transformations would clearly penetrate this order and affect the organization of the fabula. Similar to the interaction between the narrative and the fabula, the narrative also acts upon the diegesis. As a result, the diegesis as the realization of the fabula conforms to the narrative transformation. As Stephen Heath describes this action:

> Simple definition: a narrative action is a series of elements held in a relation of transformation such that their consecution – the movement of the transformation from the ones to the others – determines a state S' different to an initial state S. Clearly the action includes S and S' that it specifies as such – beginning and end are grasped from this action, within the relations it sustains, the fiction of the film is its 'unity', that of the narrative. A beginning therefore, is always a violence, the interruption of the homogeneity of S (once again, the homogeneity – S itself – being recognized in retrospect from that violence, that interruption) ..
> The task of the narrative – the point of the transformation – is to resolve the violence, to replace it in a new homogeneity.[20]

Stephen Heath Questions of Cinema (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1981), p 136

In *Blackmail*, the interruption of the homogeniety arises from an argument between Alice and Frank, and her ambiguous attitude to Frank which results in her assignation with Crewe. This interruption transforms the first order – that of the homogeneity – into a conflict Narrative transformation, however, should not be identified with the diegetic events. The diegetic events are committed to a spatio–temporal order in a linear direction. Narrative transformation, on the other hand, lies in a more abstract and non-linear level than those of the causal chain of the events. In *Blackmail*, Alice's behaviour remains at the level of the diegesis, whereas conflicting desires, namely Frank's desire for Alice and Alice's desire to manipulate Frank's behaviour, constitute the first motivation for the narrative's transformation.

In order to further my argument let me lay out the movements between diegesis, fabula and narrative in *Blackmail* more systematically. The fabula of *Blackmail* is based on the consequences of an assignation, a rape attempt, a murder in self-defence, a blackmailing and finally a counter-blackmailing in order to eliminate the original blackmailing. The diegesis of *Blackmail*, on the other hand, consists of a relationship between a Scotland yard detective and the daughter of a shop-keeper. The diegesis also includes Alice's involvement with an artist and a blackmailer. Finally, narrative is a system constituting a desire of the text to transform events from one state or condition to another

To consider narrative, however, as merely a mechanism of

transformation excludes the authorial discourse of its individual narrator. The fabula, on the other hand, together with its system of looks, allows the intervention of Hitchcock in its specific structure In the case of *Blackmail*, the desire(s) of the narrative and the filmmaker interact, allowing one to see the common motives which can apply both to the narrative and to the fabula. Indeed, both the narrative and the fabula follow a similar path in order to lead the series of events from homogeneity to conflict and finally to resolution. The narrative, in this particular context, establishes a self-propelling mechanism of desire which rules out the possibility of an artistic intervention. Hence the authorial treatment is constructed within the desires of the narrative and reflects its conformity with certain ordering systems such as blackmailing, transgression of the law and the subordination of women The authorial treatment then becomes part of the machinery of these ordering systems.

However, it is the link between the story and the narration which suggests the possibility of enunciation Just as the mode of oral story-telling oscillates between a told story and the presence of the story-teller, so, equally, filmic narrating oscillates between its fabula and the treatment of the story from the visual viewpoint At the level of the filmic narrating of the diegesis, the discourse is no longer concerned with the spatio–temporal order of the diegesis. The discourse here is rather concerned with the 'dressing' of the fabula. Although this dressing is confined to one single diegesis at each time, certain codes, common to all narrative texts, work through the text in order to establish their 'aspects', to use Mieke Bal's term Roland Barthes defines the code thus:

> . . . each code is one of the forces that take over the text (of which the text is the network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is 'lost' in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices becomes *writing* . . . [21]

[21] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* p 21

As Barthes suggests in *S/Z*, the agglomeratic codes, namely semic, cultural and symbolic codes are the codes of *histoire* and *discours* since they function to describe the text rather than to propel the narrative forward The narration of the story, in this case, is formed by the role of the discourse The paradigmatic choice of these codes by the narrator produces the story. I would like to apply the agglomeratic codes to a few instances in *Blackmail*'s story in order to examine the enunciation at this level.

The film opens with the closeup image of the rotating wheel of the Scotland Yard flying-squad van The next shot makes it clear that a

group of detectives are in the midst of a raid. Since no further information is given about the raid, the sequence appears as a mere event and is not linked to the next sequence While the raid contributes to the hermeneutic – it causes Frank to be late for his meeting with Alice – certain descriptive elements in the sequence work through the agglomeratic codes which do not serve to activate the narrative. Since the raid does not imply a predictable subsequent action, it does not propel the narrative forward. In contrast to narrative actions, this kind of descriptive narration can be considered as extra-diegetic narration. Nevertheless, the sequence generates a certain condition of viewing by which the spectator builds his/her expectation. Both from the narrational and descriptive points of view, the raid sequence refers to the detective genre. The sequence also employs codes familiar to the formal history of film. Russian montage is recalled by the abrupt changes in camera angles as opposed to the convention of continuity editing In a related sense the inserted shot of the flying-squad van making a U-turn is filmed by a camera placed within the vehicle, the pan shot operating near the limits of the 180 degree rule, disorientating the spectator's attention in a manner reminiscent of modernist self-reflexivity Still within the same sequence, the film style echoes German Expressionism even more directly where Frank and another Scotland Yard detective are seen in the mirror by the suspected criminal The shot reflects them in chiaroscuro lighting, a code specific to expressionistic painting but one which was also fashioned in German Expressionist films. In this sense, the sequence is simultaneously narrational, descriptive and referential, shuffling certain self-referential modes of representation familiar within modernist style, and utilizing them for narration and description

In *Blackmail* the narrative, in which every action implies a new one, begins during the second sequence when Frank meets Alice In the first sequence, however, priority is given to other codes, the most significant of which is the semic code. Roland Barthes defines it thus·

> As for the semes, we merely indicate them – without, in other words, trying either to link them to a character (or a place or an object) or to arrange them in some order so that they form a single thematic grouping, we allow them the instability, the dispersion, characteristic of motes of dust, flickers of meaning.[22]

22 Ibid, p 19

During the raid sequence the semic codes connote the efficiency, professionalism of Scotland Yard in general The most interesting aspect of this raid is that it will be repeated during the pursuit of Tracy: not only identical shots, but the same background music and the same closeup of the van's wheel as in the opening shot of the film. This serves to suggest that the pursuit of Tracy is characteristic of the well-oiled machinery of Scotland Yard. One can argue, in this

sense, that the first raid sequence is both diegetic and extra-diegetic at the same time. The purpose of foregrounding those semic codes is to emphasize the presence of law and order in general, which is used in turn to establish the conditions of the existence of the fabula. In this respect, the portrait of Frank in police uniform in Alice's room, Frank's role as a detective who is put in charge of the Chelsea murder, and the presence of a policeman on the street while Alice is in Crewe's studio, form a thematic grouping which connotes 'The Law'.

Another use of the semic code is in the violation of Alice's sexuality. The gloves which feature prominently as story events connote Alice's sexuality: they relate metonymically to her body. From the semic point of view, the pair represents her feminity. Gloves here work as a signifier of a lost object that positions the desire of the 'guilty' subject in relation to the desire(s) of the other. When Alice leaves them at a table, she asks Frank to bring them back. This action is echoed when Frank as well as Tracy find her gloves later on at Crewe's studio. As a result of the association of Alice – and her desire – with her lost gloves, her body is also perceived as fragmented. We can clearly suggest that her body is even more fragmented when the pair of gloves is split between Frank and Tracy.

My final example of using codes in terms of producing the story aspects of *Blackmail* is the sequence showing Alice and Crewe in his studio. In spite of the dialogue, the code of silent acting as referential code dominates the sequence. Her growing awareness of the social meaning of the assignation is shown through her body language and facial expressions up to the point at which she sees the jester painted by Crewe and laughs at it. The jester here has a catalytic function which serves to suspend Alice's social guilt and to release her desire to act the role of a femme fatale. However, it also foreshadows the ironic situation of Alice: she laughs at the jester initially, and is laughed at by the same jester at the end of the film. After allowing Crewe to complete her painting by adding a female nude, her desire to be desired as a femme fatale becomes even more evident when she agrees to be one of his glamorous models. The split-screen effect shows Alice's desire to fulfil the voyeuristic desire of Crewe as a painter. Alice takes off her own clothes on one side of the artist's screen while on the other Crewe sings and plays the piano with his back to Alice, whose undressing in order to change her clothes for the painting suggests – according to cultural and referential codes – a striptease. Alice drops her femme fatale role soon after Crewe attempts to kiss her. Her will to seduce Crewe transforms itself into a repulsion, as well as anxiety and horror as she realizes the consequences of her behaviour. The reflection of her guilt is most significant during her second undressing, this time in order to put her own dress back on again, which is represented in

the exact repetition of the previous split-screen shot. When she
realizes that her own dress has been taken by Crewe, her fear and
misery is reflected once again through her body language. In the
gesture and style of silent expressionistic acting seen, for example, in
Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) when Maria tries to escape from Rotwang
in the catacomb, Alice's body here becomes all impulse and instinct
as the result of Crewe's intention. While the representation of
Crewe remains the same in each split-screen shot, that of Alice
changes from being naively provocative to another Alice realizing
herself to be trapped by that same behaviour. Ironically enough, her
'silent acting' figures the psychological effect of her entrapment by
the consequences of the assignation and the murder. It can be said,
therefore, that her behaviour is determined by her introjection of
societal role requirements.

I have already discussed the relationship between the author and the
three orders of *Blackmail*'s textual organization, namely the fabula,
the diegesis and the narrative. I finally would like to discuss a
specific relationship between the fabula presentation of the
characters and the involvement of the author as a desiring subject.
The characters function both in the fabula organization of the text
and, at the same time, as the agents of a text which is not limited to
the structure of the fabula. As I discussed previously, the interaction
between the functions of the fabula organization is based on the
causality of the text. This causality, as I suggested, works within the

consequences, conditions of existence and motivations of the characters within the world of the fabula Seen within this context, all characters function in a network in order to produce a pretext for the transformation of the events

There is, however, another aspect of the character's function in which each of them cooperate with the author/subject of the text beyond their fabula function This excess value of the characters, I will suggest, arises as a result of the authorial function in the text In other words, there is a common interest between the actions of each character and the involvement of the author. This common interest is the result of the author's split subjectivity as an imaginary unified subject and as a subject of extra-textual discourses. As the product of this binary oscillation, the author/agent narrates the text via the discourses of other institutionalized modes of narrating The film, as the final result of this process, reflects the acts of the characters in a system running parallel with their functions in the fabula The use of the characters is split between their fabula function and their representation through the authorial discourse which is itself divided between the discourse of the author/subject and the multiplicity of extra-textual discourses

In order to further my argument on the representation of *Blackmail* and the involvement of its author as a split subject I would like to analyze the links between the functions of the fabula, the overdetermining factor of the extra-textual discourses and finally the construction of desire in narrative. I would like to employ Jacques Lacan's notion of imaginary and symbolic identification to describe the way in which each character appears as the projection of the desires constructed through the interaction of extra-textual discourses During the formation of *Blackmail*'s text, I will suggest, the author/subject of the film oscillates between being the author of the film and the spectator of the film In other words, the author of *Blackmail* partly 'foreshares' the voyeuristic pleasure of the film's spectator during the process of his authorship The oscillation between being the author and the spectator of his own film is the result of *Blackmail*'s textual mechanisms which produce the desire for its spectators to 'introject' and 'project' the filmic text simultaneously. During the process of introjection the author as spectator identifies with his filmic text as the signified of his own desire in narrative This seeming circularity, however, does not suggest an equality between these two processes, that is, between authorship and spectatorship In order to construct a filmic text, the author has to be guided by the voyeuristic drive of the spectator first The spectator expects to fulfil his/her own 'lack' during the spectatorship However, that spectator's lack is never totally supplied by the film itself My main point here is that the desire of the author as well as the spectator are constructed around the same split subjectivity, around, in Lacan's terms, the self and the other

In order to further my discussion, let me elaborate an analogy between the author's and spectator's relationship to the film and Lacan's notion of imaginary and symbolic identifications of the subject.

According to this analogical approach, the spectator's relation to the screen is an imaginary one. The subject becomes a spectator through the image's signified As Joan Copjec defines this relation.

> . the impression of reality results from the fact that the subject takes the image as a full and sufficient representation of itself and its world; the subject is satisfied that it has been adequately reflected on the screen . . The imaginary relation is defined as literally a relation of recognition. The subject reconceptualized as its own concepts already constructed by the Other.[23]

During the spectatorship, the subject is also guided by a fetishistic illusion and identifies with the narrative image on the screen. However, the illusion is not just the identification with the image and the assumption that what is being 'introjected' from the screen is a substitution for the spectator's own lack Putting it more precisely, the illusion is not only on the side of the spectator but on the side of the screen as well The spectator usually does not realize that his/her own desire is guided by an illusion, or in Slavoj Žižek's words, by a fetishistic inversion.[24] What the spectator overlooks is not just the fact that the identification with the screen image is an illusion, but that during the film the spectator faces his/her own lack In other words, it is during the film that the spectator approaches a fantasy-framework which is determining his/her own mode of acting in the reality itself. In his interpretation of Lacan, Žižek suggests that the subject's involvement with the other is the result of a double illusion. As Žižek argues

> [the illusion] consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*.[25]

The spectator knows that watching a film will not substitute for his/her own desire and yet he/she cannot be 'realistic enough' to choose not to see a film This is precisely because the spectator is under the illusion that the illusionary mechanism of a film offers a temporary escape from the 'real' of his/her own desire What the spectator does not realize is that the identification with the narrative image involves a dialectical process with the real of his/her own desire.

At this point, let me go back to the process of the authorship and try to describe the difference between the author and the spectator in terms of their involvement with the film. As I described previously, the function of the author stands between being the

23 Joan Copjec, The orthopsychic subject film theory and the reception of Lacan', *October*, no 49 (1989) p 59

24 Slavoj Žižek, 'The real in ideology (unpublished paper an edited version is in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [London Verso 1989])

25 Ibid

'originator' of his/her own discourse as a finished product and a spectator who expects his/her desire to be substituted Unlike the spectator who comes to see a film as a consumer, the author has to construct the film by bringing specifically filmic discourses and extra-filmic discourses together. The author's difference from the spectator is his/her ability to foresee what he/she would like to see as a spectator In this sense, the author first internalizes the spectator's desire to see films in order to construct his/her own film Just as the spectator's desire cannot be substituted by the film, the author's enunciative treatment of his/her film is constructed around a similar lack The author's attempt to realize a film is based on a desire which cannot be supplied by the film itself. In other words, the author's attempt to realize a substitution for the spectator as well as for himself is an impossible project. What he/she does not want to face is the fact that the film cannot substitute for the spectator's desire Putting it differently the film itself is also structured around the same lack as that of the spectator.

The author of *Blackmail* establishes his filmic discourse through the multiplicity of extra-filmic discourses within which his split subjectivity foresharing the desire of his spectator is also included During this process, his employment of the specifically filmic discourses dissolve into the extra-filmic discourses. Seen within this context, I will finally suggest that the split subjectivity of the author becomes part of his own text. At this point, I would like to go back to the beginning of my argument and suggest that the void of the authorial discourse in *Blackmail* is not the result of its author's intention to put his presence forward as a missing content but that this void is itself the end result of the text In this respect one may compare the hybrid characteristics of the film's representation – that is, its mixing major styles of modernism with popular culture as well as the institutionalized modes of narrating – with Charles Jenck's definition of postmodernism Jencks defines postmodern texts as 'doubly coded' one half Modern and one half something else [26] This mixture then attempts to communicate both with the public and a more specialized audience which is aware of the specific styles of modernism. In the case of a filmic text, foregroundings of modernist styles coexist with narrational and descriptive functions. In *Blackmail*, the first coding – or, in my model, the double enunciation – makes reference to modernist styles, while the second coding wraps up the first coding with institutional modes of narrating However, it should be noted that *Blackmail* does not only reflect a hybrid discourse through the mixture of these two levels in the sense of Jencks's model but manifests the limits of the selfcontained authorial discourses While modernist texts aim at presenting their agent/author as the centre of the text, *Blackmail* abandons this project and reflects the problematic nature of its authorship in presentation itself In Lyotard's view, modernist texts

26 Charles Jencks, *Late Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (London Academy Editions 1980)

allow the unpresentable to be put forward as present whereas in postmodern texts such as *Blackmail*, the unpresentable – that is the author – is put forward as absent.[27] In modernist texts, the lack is the unrepresentability of the author as a unified subject while in postmodern texts the lack is the lack of the unrepresentability of its author.
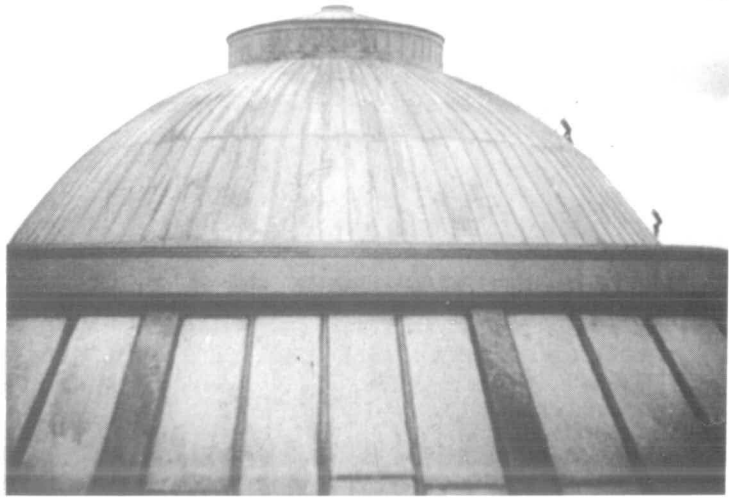
reports and debates

Cultural theory and broadcasting policy: some Australian observations

STUART CUNNINGHAM

What kind of broadcasting policy is appropriate for countries like
Australia in a period when cultural production and dissemination are
becoming more globalized and the traditional protections of national
sovereignty are being challenged? New transmission technologies for
cultural product, such as satellite, are not necessarily constrained by
national boundaries or national policies. As media baron Rupert
Murdoch put it in his notorious Edinburgh address of June 1988
'technology is ahead of all the authorities and all the politicians' *Le
défi américain* is being rivalled by *le défi technologique*. Paralleling
this technological coup, cultural and informational products are
increasingly produced for global delivery and consumption. National
cultural and communication policies have increasingly moved to
embrace the opportunities presented by hopes for a global market,
while often neglecting the threats and problems associated with this
movement.

The first section of this article focuses on the way key current
critical thought on national culture advances a deconstructive
breakdown of the nation, seeking to displace it by an emphasis on
international culture, on the one hand, and local or regional culture,
on the other. The implications of this breakdown of the nation for
cultural infrastructure and support are considered. These issues are
then focused on one of the crucial recent official inquiries which

centred on the issue of the maintenance of a national cultural
infrastructure for commercial television, and one of the inquiry's
main critics, cultural theorist John Docker.

The nation between internationalism and localism

Cultural theorists have long been preoccupied with 'the national
question'. However, most of the inspiration for this preoccupation
has derived from British inflections of cultural studies, with their
understandable desire to bring into question the control of a central
imperial power, Great Britain In its attempt to challenge the
constructed unity of the nation, this form of criticism has always
taken the power of that unity, and the inevitability and continuance
of the nation state and of its continued symbolic reproduction in
official culture, as a given. This is an assumption that does not
necessarily hold. particularly for 'weaker' nations in positions of
dependency or of 'client' status, such as Australia.

There is a 'soft' form of deconstruction, seeking to work *within*
official culture, pointing it toward greater pluralization in its
management of the image of the Australian nation. The most public
recent example of this included work at the fringe of official
bicentennial activities What Cochrane and Goodman have called
'tactical pluralism' animated some of the strategies of the Australian
Bicentennial Authority during the long preparation and final
delivery stages for Australia's bicentenary in 1988 Given the
recognition that '[s]tructurally and spiritually, the nation has less
substance than ever before', national cultures had to be
reconstituted rather than merely reproduced In this process,
Cochrane and Goodman argue, the contradictions thrown up by the
'thinness' of nationality were processed through a thoroughly
postmodern logic of managed, symbolic pluralism.[1]

Another example is the work of the foremost public intellectual-
cum-cultural critic in Australia, Donald Horne For three decades,
he has made consistent claims that cultural concerns are not
marginal to public policy, but in fact embrace and ground
economics, technological development and politics. In this respect,
his work is similar to that of James Carey in the United States and
Raymond Williams in Britain. His term as Chairman of the
country's premier arts funding body, the Australia Council, has been
the most recent in a series of public positions in which he has
brought to bear his particular brand of cultural criticism on the
delineation of policy arguments.

However, there are incoherences and inadequacies in Horne's
notion[2] of 'public culture' that have been highlighted by Tim
Rowse [3] Rowse identifies three, not necessarily coherently
interrelating, notions of public culture and its critique through

1   Peter Cochrane and David
    Goodman 'The great Australian
    journey cultural logic and
    nationalism in the postmodern
    era', in S Hanson and S
    Macintyre (eds) Making the
    Bicentenary, *Australian Historical
    Studies* vol 23 no 1 (1988), p
    23

2   Donald Horne, *The Public Culture*
    (Sydney Pluto Press 1986) see
    also by the same author, 'Arts
    funding and public culture
    Cultural Policy Studies
    Occasional Paper No 1 Institute
    of Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith
    University 1988 'Think – or
    perish! Towards a confident and
    productive Australia Occasional
    Paper No 8, Commission for the
    Future June 1988 *Ideas for a
    Nation* (Sydney Pan Books,
    1989)

3   Tim Rowse Culture as myth
    criticism as irony the middle
    class patriotism of Donald
    Horne *Island Magazine*, no 12
    (1988), pp 12–22, see also Tim
    Rowse 'The relevance of social
    theory to cultural policy *Media
    Information Australia* no 53
    (1989)

Horne's recent writings. In the first is embodied the anti-industrialism implicit throughout Horne's many writings His critique of 'the prevailing social habits of industrialism' wants to see the economism of industrial civilization transcended by a reassertion of 'culture'. Through this grounding of the notion of public culture in an understanding of modern industrial societies that bears strong resemblance to Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* or even to Matthew Arnold's lament about the effects of industrialization, Horne has continued to separate the arts as public culture from industrial and electronic manifestations of popular culture.

The second notion of public culture is closer to that of contemporary cultural studies Public cultures, in this position, are the inevitable, collective but tendentious representations of the nation, representations which should attract systematic criticism from the engaged public intellectual

In a third version, public culture takes on a more positive mien, having the potential to become so pluralist and so responsive to contending claims that it ceases being tendentious and becomes more transparent, producing a society in which people might live according to their subcultural experience, without the imposed mediation of official representations of the nation's culture [4] Rowse says that this third formulation is the boldest statement of where Horne's mode of critique might lead, but that it is also the least convincing. The dream of subcultural authenticity displacing a tendentious and cooptative nationalism has animated much left cultural writing recently, but in the process can contribute to an undermining of the rhetorics which have contributed to a national cultural infrastructure.

Another form of deconstruction seeks to work *against* official culture. It is a 'hard' leftist critique of the cooptative and repressive nature of national culture, and is centred around the eclipse of the nation state 'at both ends' – by international structures of economic and information exchange, and by responses to that at regional or local levels. This has become an insistent theme of left writing on culture, identity and economy in recent years.

Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, in their discussion of British arts policies, *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning?*, ask us to 'recognize that the end of national boundaries is often no bad thing. Afro-Caribbeans in Brixton could have more in common with Moroccans in Paris than with their upper-class neighbours in Dulwich' Saatchi and Saatchi, apostles of global advertising, point out that there are 'probably more differences between Manhattan and the Bronx than between Manhattan and the Seventh Arrondissement in Paris'.[5]

However, if we are to take account of the means by which such transnational affiliations are to be realized in practice, significant differences between regions of the world come to the forefront Even if we assume, for the purposes of argument, that future trends

4 Tim Rowse 'Culture as myth', p 15

5 Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning? From Arts to Industry – New Forms of Cultural Policy* (London Comedia Publishing Group 1986), p 113

towards internationalism and regionalism may deliver a net social good, there are no immediate comparisons that might be made between social fractions in Australia and its near neighbours

Mulgan and Worpole develop their important contribution to theorizing the cultural industries against the background of a decade of aggressive Conservative government in Britain which has removed the national arena from effective left interventions. This must be taken into account as the context for their forwarding of the potential virtues of internationalism. For these writers, the corollary to accepting internationalization as providing potential benefits is to develop regional cultural initiatives within the nation state. This model of regionalism must also be seen in specifically British terms, where there is no federal system clouding the issue of nationalism and regionalism

Mulgan and Worpole argue for a radical version of regionalism which 'would involve strengthening regional bodies to give them much greater powers of investment and economic development, as well as the power to award franchises for local radio and cable systems'.[6] Their regionalism may have pertinence in Britain, but if we are to ask appropriate Australian questions of theory, we must conclude that the concept of regionalism as a radical political and cultural force in Australia, an issue of moment in the early 1970s, is effectively dead The demographic, economic and political difficulties that overcame the Whitlam Labour government's massive experiments in regionalism in the early 1970s should give pause to any uncritical adoption of Mulgan and Worpole's model in Australia. Instead, in Australia, the rhetoric of the devolution of national cultural infrastructure is part of the conservative repertoire and always implies a devolution *to* the states within a federal system This rhetoric shows no signs of losing its saliency on conservative political agendas.

One of the most sustained left attacks on Australian nationalism is Stephen Castles, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis and Bill Morrisey's *Mistaken Identity Multiculturalism and the Demise of Australian Nationalism*.[7] This is a thoroughgoing and powerful critique of the incorporative strategies of nationalism, and indeed of the new official ideology of multiculturalism. It is a clear consequence of their analysis that the only cultural formations worth fighting for are those formed at the level of the 'community'. This is an even more ethereal and anti-infrastructural concept than that of regionalism, when it is pitted against nationalist rhetorics which have assisted in supporting the growth of a broad-based national cultural infrastructure covering policies affecting broadcasting, film, heritage and the traditional arts.

What analyses like that of *Mistaken Identity* forget is that a rhetoric and infrastructure for community (and for that matter regional or local) cultural production, and its consequent

6 Ibid pp 113–4

7 Stephen Castles, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis and Michael Morrisey *Mistaken Identity Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism* (Leichhardt Pluto Press 1988)

employment and economic multipliers, have emerged in Australia only recently, and that these developments have been facilitated by initiatives taken and arguments won at the level of national policy coordination and funding Australian rhetorics of nationalism, in the recent past and for the foreseeable future, which might appear transparently ideological to the cultural critic, are, in fact, of recent vintage and are quite vulnerable to the stronger imperatives toward internationalization which have a persuasive technological and economic cachet. Without a national cultural infrastructure, and a workable rhetoric to sustain it, there would be far fewer sources for the enlivening of community, local, regional or subcultural infrastructures

The most significant recent contribution addressing internationalism, nationalism and localism for Australian film and television criticism and policy is Elizabeth Jacka's summary analytical chapter in a recent book on the Australian film industry in the 1980s, *The Imaginary Industry*. The chapter is tellingly titled 'Australian Cinema: An Anachronism in the '80s?'. Indeed, her remarks about 'an ever widening gap between cultural critique and cultural policy'[8] as they bear on the question of Australian content regulation set the frame for this article Her call is for policy makers to take greater heed of the more sophisticated understandings of national identity that have emerged from recent developments in critical theory However, her discussion of the trends in this analysis is very ambivalent. Drawing on some of the conclusions in her and Susan Dermody's earlier books on Australian cinema,[9] she asks whether local identity should become a more pertinent focus of analysis and meaning construction than the rather shop-soiled and compromised 'official' nationalism that has generated story line and ambience in so many feature films and mini-series of the 1970s and 1980s.

Jacka well recognizes that national policies of regulation and subsidy are required if appropriate responses are to be made to growing pressures toward internationalization of cultural meaning, but locates them as basically undergirding economic and employment rationales for industry protection However, as will be discussed in the next section, these rationales are no longer sufficient to underwrite government intervention in the cultural industries, nor can they be put in the policy arena on their own terms, for they fly in the face of governing economic imperatives for industry restructuring and efficiency gains

To establish a *cultural* mandate for the ongoing management of Australia's cultural economy, Jacka dismisses 'the nationalist, the populist, the touristy' and instead opts for the local. The local is potentially more authentic than the national, and doesn't set up old and tired oppositions between a national 'us' and a foreign 'them'. But the authentically local escapes regulatory description; indeed, as

8 Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (eds), *The Imaginary Industry Australian Film in the late '80s* (North Ryde Australian Film Television and Radio School MIA no 50 1988) p 118

9 Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka *The Screening of Australia Volume 1 Anatomy of an Industry* (Sydney Currency Press, 1987) and Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka *The Screening of Australia Volume 2 Anatomy of a National Cinema* (Sydney Currency Press 1988)

10 Ibid p 127

the new locus of the search for the 'progressive text', any attempt to enshrine it in policy terms would mean the nullification of its progressive nature. Jacka's conclusion, that '[r]egulation of Australian content then is not a sufficient condition for the sort of cultural production I have discussed, but perhaps it is a necessary one',[10] does not advance a firmer understanding of the source from which rationales for national cultural policy might ensue, because the most highly valued cultural product, by definition, escapes the policy frame.

To oppose internationalism and varieties of localism or regionalism to the nation state and national culture is both unhelpful and unnecessary for policy-oriented cultural theory The symptomatic critique of official national culture seizes on terms like 'imagined communities',[11] developed by Benedict Anderson to describe the emergence of nationalism as *the* modern form of the organization of the polity, and 'imagines' that this approach contributes to a postmodern deconstruction of the category in favour of racial, economic and supranational forms of organization But recent literature on nationalism[12] suggests that nationalism stems from, and has historically coexisted with, international formations A recent official report into Australianizing the tertiary curriculum, *Windows onto Worlds*, put it aptly·

11 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London Verso 1983)

12 Ibid see also Bruce Kapferer *Legends of People Myths of State Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988) and Philip Schlesinger 'On national identity some conceptions and misconceptions criticized', in *Social Science Information*, vol 26 no 2 (1987), pp 219–64

13 Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE) *Windows onto Worlds Studying Australia at Tertiary Level* (Canberra AGPS June 1987), p 17

> internationalism rejoices in a multiplicity of independent nations ... [it] is not the abolition of nations, but is built upon self-reliant nations which require neither chauvinism nor cosmopolitanism to cope with their country's inadequacies and achievements.[13]

Cultural theory, as well, must become aware of the limitations of the search for ever new definitions of the progressive text. In the most recent instance of this search, it is the local rather than official national 'accents' that are prized But the local is equally subject to what the symptomatic critic would decry as inauthenticity – for instance, the revamped American series *Mission: Impossible* turned locations in regional Australia into central Europe! The search embodies, in however confused a way, the laudable need to ground cultural analysis in a value system that delivers the critic's work from the solipsistic tyranny of taste. However, the critic's search for values must not become a matter of simple projection of academic canons onto an industrial system of production and a highly fractionated world of reception. If it is to orient itself in a more valuable way towards policy imperatives, criticism must scale back its theoretical *avant-gardisme* and attend to the tasks of consolidating the legitimacy of policy rhetorics which sustain a national cultural infrastructure.

There are high stakes involved in the arguments for internationalism, community and regionalism against the nation All the major cultural industries (film, television, the major arts and the

many community-based arts programmes sponsored by the Australia Council) derive their justification from their being national in scope. It is too early, if indeed it will ever be politically strategic, to support the internationalist-regionalist against the national position in Australia.

Ultimately, despite Australia's byzantine tripartite system of government, making it one of the most 'governed' countries in the world, it is at the national level that debate on cultural futures has to be staged. The optimum realistic future for local, regional, state, subcultural, ethnic, Aboriginal, experimental or innovative futures in cultural production is unavoidably bound into the future of national cultural policies. In terms both of the intellectual resourcing of policy development and in the myriad ways local, state and subcultural sites of activity depend on national provision and support, the national arena will remain the engine room for cultural policy initiatives. For its part, cultural theory, which currently prizes disaggregated, multiple, non-normative and nondeterminist approaches to cultural phenomena, must take greater stock of its potential negative influence on progressive public policy outcomes

The Australian Content Inquiry

With these broad critical and policy contexts in mind, we will now turn to a crucial recent official inquiry, which centred on the issue of the maintenance of a national cultural infrastructure for commercial television, the Broadcasting Tribunal's Australian Content Inquiry, which concluded its main considerations in December 1989 with the determination of a new Television Program Standard 14.[14] The Inquiry demonstrated commitment to the legitimacy of necessary regulatory initiatives when they are rational, carefully-targeted, and capable of being successfully implemented, and displayed considerable political will in the face of prevailing public rhetorics of deregulation and often highly tendentious criticism.

14 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) Television Program Standard 14 'Australian content on commercial television, IP/86/11A November 1989

There has been since 1960 some degree of regulation for Australian content on commercial television. For the most part, it focused on what is today dubbed the 'transmission quota' approach to content regulation the setting of a percentage figure across all, or most, transmission hours, which were to be filled by locally-produced product. In contradistinction to this is the 'prime-time' approach to regulation, which focuses on the most important element, from both the licensees' and the viewers' perspective, of the broadcasting schedule – the hours between six pm and either ten pm or midnight This approach, for most of the 1960s, received little attention, nor did any special provision for Australian drama, the most difficult material to secure on television schedules because of its high cost relative to imported programmes, and yet arguably the

most sensitive material to regulate for, if national audiences are to have reflected back to them their own images, their own stories, and their own recognizable concerns

A new approach, which became known as the points system, was instituted in 1973 It required stations to meet a certain number of points related to their hours of transmission and allocated different amounts of points to different categories of programmes. Arts and educational programming received high points scores, while sport and quiz shows received low scores. The intention of the scheme was to encourage the production of high points-scoring material in order to earn sufficient points to offset the fact that no points at all were allocated for foreign material.

In practice, however, the points system did not achieve this effect, since the points target was set at such a low level that virtually every station met their target without needing to take the regulatory system into consideration in their scheduling or programming decisions The stations were, however, concerned about a second aspect of the points system, which they could not meet as readily as their points target: the 104 hours annual drama quota While some stations programmed significantly more than 104 hours of Australian drama per year, even in 1985, eleven years after the drama quota was introduced, one network only met the quota with special dispensation from the Tribunal, which allowed them to count material outside the prime-time hours

The inadequacies of the points system had been manifestly obvious for many years It was a cumbersome, unnecessarily intricate method for assessing Australian content The system was based essentially on a transmission quota covering the hours from six am to midnight, and thus allowed the more sensitive issue of prime-time drama to languish The survival of the system, unchallenged for so long, was symptomatic of the operations of what Murray Edelman has called 'symbolic policy'.[15] The Tribunal was in the sway of 'regulatory capture'. The regulations were in need of substantial overhaul, having, at base, not changed in sixteen years

The Tribunal's initial statements of intent[16] regarding the shape of the new standard proposed several major changes to the old points system The *targeting* of regulation had changed. far greater emphasis was placed on prime-time and on drama and other 'quality' programming, and less on overall transmission time. The *levels* of Australian-produced prime-time drama required to be reached by networks were raised substantially The *types* of Australian-produced material to attract regulatory encouragement changed to include not only high-cost drama, but also a greatly expanded 'diversity' category, which included variety, social documentary, arts and science programmes, current affairs/news specials and 'new concepts' (programmes which innovated in matter and manner of presentation). There was also a quantum leap in the

15 Murray Edelman *Political Language Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York Academic Press 1977) see also Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago University of Chicago Press 1988)

16 ABT Australian content proposal for commercial television 9 December 1988, and ABT, 'Australian content for commercial television, Draft Television Program Standard 14 June 1989

minimum hours of children's drama, as well as different weightings for 'quality' based on the imputed purchase price per hour of drama and diversity material.

But, to the surprise and consternation of many observers and interested parties, the Tribunal's draft formulations of what should constitute an Australian programme for the purposes of the standard departed significantly from time-honoured and legislatively-sanctioned criteria based on control by creative personnel Hitherto, the criteria for determining the degree of 'Australianness' of programming had been virtually identical to those obtaining in the Australian Film Commission Act and in Division 10BA of the tax legislation on which decisions for assistance to film and television production had been based.

Now these criteria were to be changed dramatically The guiding concept of the 'Australian look' had been developed into a four-pronged test of 'onscreen' cultural exactitude·

- *Theme* 'Subject matter pertains to aspects of life in Australia or of the life of an Australian or Australians';

- *Perspective·* 'Subject matter is presented from an Australian view point',

- *Language* 'Speech used by Australian characters is the speech, including idiom or accents found among people who meet the definition of an Australian',

- *Character·* 'Portrayal of Australian characters is recognizably Australian'

The proposal and draft standard thus appeared to many a highly regressive document It sought to define the Australianness of a given programme as it is viewed onscreen and commit the Tribunal to a hermeneutic rather than an administrative process. It asserted that there is an Australianness that can be registered in identifiable, categorizable and regulatable textual elements In this, it certainly flew in the face of cultural theory that emphasizes the 'invention' of Australia, that argues that there are no Australians, only ways of constructing people as Australians This approach can come to the conclusion reached by Tim Rowse and Albert Moran in their essay 'Peculiarly Australian – the political construction of cultural identity' that 'it is impossible to define Australian Content in television'.[17] The Tribunal also opened its approach to the criticism that it was attempting to turn commercial television into a bastion of 'Cultural Values' more akin to the charters of the public broadcasters – the ABC and the SBS Some participants in the inquiry were of the view that this was a case of 'culture gone mad', confusing the ultimate objective of regulation to encourage Australian content and the administrative means to that end

17 Tim Rowse and Albert Moran
Peculiarly Australian – the
political construction of cultural
identity, in S Encel and L
Bryson (eds) *Australian Society
Introductory Essays* (Melbourne
Longman Cheshire, 1984) p 231

However, the purpose of this approach was clear enough. It was arguably the first attempt in any modern western system of broadcasting regulation to move from pinpointing structural and employment criteria to defining textual markers of nationality in the implementation phase of regulation. In its own fashion, the Tribunal was attempting to respond to the increasing financial and cultural tendencies of internationalization in Australian film and television production From this stems its view that a regulatory body can no longer hold that any production is Australian merely because it is made by Australians And it is not altogether perverse to see the Tribunal's belief in the priority of 'onscreen' registrations of Australianness as not dissimilar to the strong investments in the power of textual meaning in dominant traditions of cultural theory

There was also another equally significant purpose in this structuring of the draft standard the prevailing economic and political climate in western industrialized democracies for more than a decade has ensured that traditional protectionist or employment-based arguments for industry, including the cultural industries, are being rapidly eroded. If the Tribunal has any justification for continued intervention of this sort in the broadcasting marketplace, it must lie ultimately in a 'cultural demand' mandate based on declared viewer preference for reasonable levels and varieties of Australian material. From this mandate could stem 'cultural supply', the freshly-supportable assumption that the production of such material would be most likely to arise from creative control by Australians working within these cultural guidelines. The administrative means toward this laudable end, however, would be uncertain in their operation.

There was a trade-off in favour of the networks with regard to the transmission quota, with a fifty per cent Australian quota to be reached four years from January 1990, starting at a base of thirty-five per cent and moving up five per cent each year. Given that transmission quotas varying between forty to fifty per cent have been in place for most of the early part of television's history, and that the networks together have averaged just over fifty per cent Australian transmission content for some time, this trade-off demonstrates the extent to which the philosophical underpinnings of the discredited points system have been superceded by an approach focusing on careful targeting of prime time programming to encourage 'quality' and 'diversity' in the most cost- and culturally-sensitive features of Australian television. If these figures are placed against those in other countries to which Australia is often compared (British television is expected to carry eighty to eighty-five per cent indigenous product, Canada around sixty per cent, while American network television carries an overwhelming ninety-eight per cent indigenous material), we can see that the cultural mantle the commercial networks are expected to wear is far from onerous.

With regard to regionalism or localism, it is significant that the Tribunal, in determining the standard, made a clear distinction between meeting the needs of local service areas and facilitating diversity in the television production industry as an expression of regionalism. Noting that there are already a number of dramas which portray regional Australia (examples quoted included *A Country Practice*, *The Flying Doctors*, *A Fortunate Life* and *The Shiralee*) the Tribunal nevertheless stated that it was not its role to 'ensure jobs for people in particular production locations in Australia' While it is the clearly stated intention of broadcasting legislation that local service areas be adequately served with news and information relevant to those areas, the Tribunal took the view that there was no legislative mandate for ensuring employment in 'broadcasting related industries' (that is, film and television drama production infrastructures) outside Sydney and Melbourne.[18]

18 ABT, Television Program Standard 14 'Australian content on commercial television', p 16

Meanwhile, the 'Australian look' provisions of the earlier proposal and draft standard have been renamed as the 'Australian factor'. The new way of structuring the standard has the earlier 'look' elements of onscreen theme, perspective, language and character embodied in a prolegomena setting out the objectives of the new standard The onscreen elements will only be considered in the administration of the standard if there is a conflict about creative control of production.

This might seem yet another classic case of symbolic policy in operation – the cultural criterion displayed into a motherhood statement before the real business of employment protection and industry trade-offs, as reflected in the levels and calibrations of the quotas, is done However, symbolic policy can have real imperatives and real effects, and can evidence a creative response to the progressive discrediting of protectionist regulation. There is a clear distinction made between protecting employment and the exercise of creative control The structure of the standard operationalizes the assumption that employment and industrial details follow from the cultural desiderata. If this were not the case, the rationale for regulation in this area of cultural policy would be greatly diminished

The Tribunal was subject to high level political pressure, including official United States representations, to move toward deregulation of its standard More public criticism of the standard came from the financial press, editorial writers in the major dailies, economic rationalists in powerful think tanks, and from cultural theorist John Docker. It focused on the 'cultural engineering' this kind of content regulation allegedly represents, and on the distorting economic effects caused by such intervention in the broadcasting market

'Quality' as a term used in the inquiry and the standard was subject to widespread criticism from those who had interests in casting the Tribunal as imposing high cultural standards on a

commercial medium. In point of fact, the quality criterion was in essence a measure of budgetary levels and therefore production risk factors for different types of television product, and a reflection of the Tribunal's desire to encourage diversity by scoring one-off material (mini-series, telemovies and films) higher than continuous product (serials and series). The fact that the term quality could be misconstrued, deliberately or otherwise, may reflect on the problems associated with terms in common use when taken up into policy rhetoric, but that does not excuse commentators from reading the term in context. Endless repetition of the image of cultural commissar-bureaucrats 'administering' the habits and taste of ordinary viewers can have an insidious bandwagon effect. Far from being a cultural engineer, the Tribunal is only requiring that the status quo be maintained in relation to Australian content as networks face the financial consequences of the exorbitantly-leveraged borrowing which funded their recent owners' acquisitions in 1986–7.

Cultural theory and the Inquiry: 'Popular culture versus the state'

A remarkable rapprochement between cultural theory and network management was reached during the Inquiry when a major submission from the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) appended cultural theorist and critic John Docker's monograph 'Popular culture versus the state: an argument against Australian content regulation for television'.[19] Docker, who was best known for his histories of Australian cultural elites,[20] employed in the monograph an array of contemporary cultural theory to attack the legitimacy of regulation for Australian content on television

Docker's argument is built around a plausible, but ultimately bizarre, reading of the history of regulation of Australian television. Undergirding this reading is a theoretical reprise on cultural studies' privileging of the active audience pitted against governmental supervision of television, and an over-reliance on a simple binary opposition between high and popular culture

Docker argues that the history of regulation of Australian television is a history of the imposition of Reithian high cultural values on an essentially demotic, popular medium This imposition, he says, has been achieved by virtue of the efforts of interest groups (including production industry unions and guilds, arts bodies, children's television lobbyists, moralists and public interest advocates), which are unrepresentative of the tastes and interests of 'the people', in collaboration with the regulatory bodies – the Australian Broadcasting Control Board and then the Tribunal. The commercial broadcasters (by whose lobby group, FACTS, the monograph was submitted to the Inquiry), on the other hand, have

19 John Docker, 'Popular culture versus the state an argument against Australian content regulations for TV', unpublished manuscript Attachment to Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) submission to ABT Inquiry into Australian Content on Commercial Television, 16 August 1988 (Document D0020B ABT Inquiry File I P/86/11A), see also John Docker Popular culture versus the state an argument against Australian content regulations for television, Media Information Australia no 59 (1991)

20 John Docker, Australian Cultural Elites (Sydney Angus and Robertson, 1974) John Docker, In a Critical Condition Reading Australian Literature (Ringwood Penguin, 1984)

been 'acutely sensitive' to the people and have been marginalized in the regulatory process and hounded into compliance with elitist cultural dictates unsuitable for commercial television

Regulation for Australian content. in Docker's view, actually means the imposition of (British) high cultural values onto popular cultural forms whose appeal is indifferent to national variations and registrations What viewers actively participate in and embrace in television culture, according to Docker, is the carnivalesque overturning of statist official culture and the celebration of working-class values and interests

These values and interests are transnational and are inherently subversive of statist interventions to preserve national registrations of popular cultural forms Further, *any* statist intervention is opposed – Graeme Turner aptly crystallizes the thrust of Docker's argument in these words

> Where the state is elite and conservative, the popular is democratic and transgressive, and so the regulation of the cultural economy should be left to the people themselves [21]

21 Graeme Turner, It works for me British cultural studies, Australian cultural studies, Australian film paper delivered to The Future of Cultural Studies Conference April 1990, p 23

Docker collapses his simple binary opposition of high versus popular culture onto the quite separate issue of Australian versus imported product, neglecting the fact that the Tribunal's regulation for Australian content in both its pre- and post-Inquiry forms is aimed to encourage the screening of soap operas (much loved by Docker) as much as the objects of his criticism, the so-called high cultural (but actually only, in regulatory terms, high budget) drama like mini-series, telemovies and films. In championing the most evidently populist of popular commercial product – quiz and game shows and serial drama – he distorts the strategy of the Tribunal of only regulating to encourage those types of local production which, because of huge cost differentials between cheap imports and expensive indigenous product, would be subject to wild fluctuation if an unregulated market was to prevail. Quiz and game shows, news and current affairs, and sport would continue regardless of regulation because they are cheap to make They are not subject to special regulation for this reason, not because of an elitist bias against them by the Tribunal or interest groups and lobbyists.

It is not surprising that Docker's arguments had no effect on the debates in, and outcomes of, the Inquiry (Indeed, although FACTS' and the individual networks' ambit claim was always against regulation in principle, in practice they were always prepared for trade-offs against that ambit claim. The placement of Docker's monograph on the public record by FACTS was less than serious evidentiary bargaining, rather only rhetorical grist to the mill.) But that should not in itself be a cause for good feeling, as it was the only significant contribution to the Inquiry that presented any of the theoretical issues that have been of such concern to cultural critics

22 Ibid p 24

for decades. Docker's view of popular television and its audiences may be one idiosyncratic extrapolation of current strands of cultural theory, but it is, in Turner's words, 'directly licensed' by them.[22] To applaud Docker's irrelevance could be tantamount to applauding, from the viewpoint of policy making process, the irrelevance of critical and theoretical input in general

Docker's romantic libertarianism and utopian populism is shared by almost no other thinker from the left (or from the right for that matter) in Australia, at least in an explicitly worked-out fashion, although there are similar elements in the work of John Fiske and Keith Windshuttle [23] However, at the level of posture and priority, there is much that links Docker to broad streams of postmodernism and associated celebrations of internationalism over against national cultural production. And it should give critics pause to consider that Docker seeks explicit legitimation for his views from recent trends in British and American cultural studies.

23 John Fiske Reading the Popular (London Unwin Hyman, 1989) Keith Windshuttle The Media A New Analysis of the Press, Television Radio and Advertising in Australia (Ringwood Penguin, 1988)

The rediscovery of audience responses and resistances, led by a neo-marxist (in Fiske's case) or a populist libertarian (in Docker's case) reformulation of uses and gratifications approaches has been an important corrective to the fashion of the 1970s to see audiences as supinely 'positioned' by textual processes. However, this development has driven a wedge between the political economy of cultural production and audience reception and response – a division starkly borne out in recent cultural studies literature that sees a widening chasm between journals concentrating on textual meanings and audience response, like *Cultural Studies*, and those, like *Media, Culture and Society*, which concentrate on institutional analysis and policy issues Into this gap Docker can step, armed with a doctrinaire anti-statism and an aggressively negative posture toward organized interest group advocacy in the pursuit of policy outcomes By withdrawing from these areas, and by embracing a postmodernist internationalism, contemporary cultural studies provides opportunities for the arguments of critics like Docker

The significance of the Inquiry

In bringing down its final version of the standard, the Tribunal put the case for regulation in the most current terms. It stated that it was seeking to provide a safety net for a significant minority of Australian content on commercial television, that it was in the process targeting intervention more efficiently and accurately, with the result that there would be less regulation, that its approach was to encourage a wide diversity of production types and allow great flexibility for licensees in meeting the requirements of the new standard, and that it was taking a commercially realistic approach to broadcasting development.[24]

24 ABT Television Program Standard 14, 'Australian content on commercial television p 3

The Tribunal's regulation for Australian content will continue to attract strong, high level, and often misinformed criticism. The standard, however, remains one of the only significant output-related policies (that is, a form of support for Australian culture that goes to the question of dissemination, rather than production, of indigenous product) that has been attempted, and with success. Without it, the landscape of Australian culture would be far harder to cultivate.

The rise and fall of entrepreneurial TV: Australian TV, 1986–90

TOM O'REGAN

1 This paper is a substantially revised version of an article entitled 'Of money and madness' in *Filmnews*, July 1990 pp 8–11

The parlous state of Australian TV[1]

In the 1988/9 financial year, the Australian commercial TV industry lost money for the first time since 1957. At the time of writing, in September 1990, two of Australia's three commercial networks – Seven and Ten – are in the hands of receivers. Seven has been that way all year. Ten was put into receivership on 14 September 1990 – a little more than one year after former network owner, Frank Lowy, sold the network at a discounted price to its new owner, Steve Cosser. Leading network, the Nine Network, has recently changed hands for a fraction of its original purchase price, sold by Kerry Packer to Alan Bond's Bond Media group for $A1 1 billion (1 billion = 1,000 million, $A1 = $US0 81, UK43p), was repurchased by Packer in a deal which put the value of the Network at an estimated $A410–$A485 million [2] The financial state of the Australian industry is represented by the Seven Network's earning of $A4.83 million *before* its interest and tax bills are taken into account in the 1988/9 financial year. A similar picture emerges for the other networks The lowest rating Ten Network lost $A114 3 million in 1988/9 and expects to lose $A85–95 million in the 1990 calendar year [3] This crippled financial state has led to dramatic job losses at the TV stations themselves since mid-1989· at Ten twenty-five per cent of network staff have lost their jobs. The medium term outlook for TV network affiliates in regional Australia, servicing some thirty-three per cent of the Australian TV audience, is looking increasingly desperate.[4]

2 Packer's Consolidated Press converted its $A200 million in preference shares owed by Bond Media and a further $A25 million in interests and dividends into fifty-five per cent of Bond Media An additional $A79 million was to be raised to pay off debt to Bell Resources

3 Neil Shoebridge, 'Ten now for the hard part', *Business Review Weekly*, 22 June 1990 p 23

4 Tony Thomas Regional TV's woes' *Business Review Weekly*, 2 February 1990 pp 54–9

As networks slash production spending by as much as forty to fifty per cent, the independent programme production industry, which is the major supplier of Australian commercial TV programming, is undergoing a dramatic downturn Established producers are seeing new productions cancelled or indefinitely shelved and unemployment within the industry is mounting. Not only have actors' rates declined but work opportunities are considered to be the worst in the Australian film industry in twenty-five years.[5] Already creative personnel from actors to camera operators to directors are in or seeking overseas employment; and Australian production houses like Grundy's are in the process of establishing offshore production companies to service markets with greater production opportunities.[6] In this context coproductions become *de rigeur*, with the 'purely Australian product' (which has been so successful on British screens with *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*) being seen as too costly for 'an Australian network to shoulder' [7]

Finally, to meet US trade pressure and the Australian government's microeconomic reform agenda, the regulation which stipulates that all TV advertisements should be Australian-made is likely to be somewhat eased. This is expected to further diminish opportunities within the Australian film industry as well as to have a negative impact upon the technological infrastructure available to the Australian film industry as a whole

The immediate outlook for Australian TV is bleak. What happened? How did a previously profitable – and highly competitive – TV industry with minimum debt levels and expanding overseas export markets become a basket case saddled with crippling debts and a subtantial production downturn despite the international success of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*?

Backgrounds: the entrepreneurial game plan

The Australian commercial TV crisis had its immediate origins in two unrelated governmental decisions The first was the deregulation of the Australian financial sector which created long credit lines fuelling an investment boom in which accepted price to earnings ratios became grossly inflated The second was the federal government's decisions to change TV ownership rules and introduce more TV to regional Australia The ownership rules changed from a limit of two stations that any one company could own, to a limit expressed in terms of the overall share of the audience able to be reached [8] After November 1986 a company could have access to TV stations with a cumulative reach of sixty per cent of the total Australian market (prior to the sixty per cent market share rule coming in, the highest market share available was forty-three per cent – only available in theory to three companies – those which

5 *Sunday Herald* 1 July 1990

6 Grundy s has recently set up production subsidiaries in Spain Belgium Luxembourg and the Netherlands see *Screen Digest* July 1990, p 150

7 Terry Ohlsson chief of Crawford Productions quoted in Guy Alcorn and Raymond Gill *The West Australian* 30 June 1990

8 For an account of the politics of these media changes see Paul Chadwick *Media Mates* (Melbourne Macmillan 1989)

owned both a Sydney and Melbourne TV station) Accompanying this extension in the allowable market size came cross-media ownership limitations which restricted common ownership of TV, radio and the press in a particular geographical market. The catalyst immediately driving these regulatory changes was the plan to bring three commercial stations to regional TV markets. This 'equalization' policy was to be achieved by a process of 'aggregating' adjacent regional TV markets into larger single markets Briefly, this involved turning some thirty regional TV markets on the eastern seaboard, where only a commercial and an ABC station (Australian Broadcasting Corporation – rough BBC equivalent) were available, into four discrete markets where the ABC and three commercial stations would be available. For some of the larger cities in these markets a fifth public network, the SBS (Special Broadcasting Service – a cross between BBC 2 and Channel Four), would also be made available.[9] Aggregation thus promised the integration of most regional TV markets with their metropolitan counterparts. In short, equalization would bring TV networking to regional markets And the ownership changes would enable companies to get bigger and to exercise qualitatively greater control over the shape, profits, and definition of the TV market than was possible hitherto

Additionally, the launch of the domestic satellite AUSSAT in 1986 promised a new TV message delivery structure The purchase of satellite transponders by the networks replaced per message charges on the Telecom terrestrial network. Australia had not had much 'simultaneous' TV up to that point; on commercial TV it was sporting events, current affairs programming like the weekly *60 Minutes*, and some national news segments. Like Italian commercial TV, Australian TV used videotape delivery extensively Whilst the same programming was aired throughout Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide (Perth and the regionals used the same material but less of it), it tended not to be broadcast at the same time, nor on the same day, nor in the same order [10] The combination of the satellite and the extended market share available to companies now encouraged the networking of programme schedules.

Network, common ownership, and a technologically advanced delivery system seemed to offer a chance to get additional advertising revenues, with networks controlling national advertising, having wrested that from the advertising agencies Ad space buyers would only do more or less one stop shopping, bringing added business and greater control over the TV system, from Sydney head-office right down the line to Cairns and Perth. The networks, now national players at the pinnacle of the system, commanding sixty per cent of the national audience, would be in a position to dictate terms to the smaller regional market players, which would have no

9 Two states, Western Australia and Southern Australia have been omitted from the equalization plan on the grounds of their insufficient regional population to support three commercial stations Neither Tasmania nor the Northern Territory were considered for equalization

10 Tom O'Regan, Towards a high communications policy assessing recent changes within Australian broadcasting *Continuum*, vol 2 no 1 (1989) pp 135–58 see also The background to TV networking in Glen Lewis and Elizabeth Moore *Australian Communications Technology and Policy* (Sydney Centre for Information Studies & AFTRS, 1988) pp 126–43 and Aspects of the Australian film & TV interface *Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, nos 17/18 (1986) pp 5–33

11 Gomery notes that 'One study found that between 1964 and 1976 network income increased some 575 per cent (some forty-four per cent per year) while payments to affiliates rose only thirty-four per cent (some three per cent per year)', see Douglas Gomery 'Economic change in the US television industry' *Screen* vol 25 no 2 (1984) p 63

alternative but to become their affiliates The profits to be had from this, based on American experience, must have looked promising.[11] Thus under the new conditions companies sought to become networks owning four of the five largest TV markets in the country (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide collectively making up sixty-seven per cent of the Australian viewing audience). Prior to the changes, networks were a loose grouping of stations operating in the major metropolitan markets of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide (and Perth after 1988 when a third commercial station came on stream) These networks were dominated by the companies controlling Sydney and Melbourne licences Under the new conditions, the existing structural subordination of Brisbane and Adelaide stations could be replaced in two of the three markets of Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth with branch office control.

The cross-ownership regulation in itself was bound to spark activity in media stock as companies readjusted themselves to the new environment. Similarly, the extension in market share was bound to create a speculative environment as a premium price could be expected to be paid for such effective control over the Australian TV audience This was particularly so in the context of 1987/8 where it appeared that the sixty per cent audience share would be raised to seventy-five per cent But the regulatory background and the logic of market opportunity cannot explain the inflation of media asset values that resulted. Responsibility for that must be shared by financial deregulation and Australia's entrepreneurial business culture of the 1980s

The prices paid for TV stations were underwritten by domestic and foreign banks eager to lend in a newly deregulated environment Banks in Australia, fearing competition from each other and foreign banks, scrambled for market share, forgetting for a time all the rules about prudent lending and how to compete in an oligopolistic market (that is, 'compete' in an arranged sort of way so that risks are minimized and market shares become predictable). They actively sought potential debtors, bidding against each other for the rights to service bigger and bigger debts of increasingly indebted clients

The availability of easy credit fitted all too well the public company logic of the 1970s and 1980s, which had previously been kept in check by financial regulation This logic went something like this: 'Go into debt Forget about developing equity and cash reserves – that only makes you liable as a takeover target by a company with long credit lines' In this climate, publicly listed companies had to go sufficiently far into debt to stave off takeover bids from people seeking to convert equity and cash into tax benefited debt

Aiding this logic was the common practice of Australian corporate 'raiders' to buy assets, revalue them upwards, and use that revalued

asset to borrow against for additional purchases. Seven and Nine's new owners, Skase and Bond, were amongst the biggest culprits here Revaluations could even occur after asset-stripping. This revaluation was made possible by rising share values and market confidence in these players – particularly as they seemed to be the most outward looking, keen to establish not simply national, but also international, profiles. These same corporate raiders also exploited the tax act to use the size of their interest on debt to minimize tax payments, thus reducing the effective rate of interest by the amount that would have been paid in taxes. Only when interest rates reached the twenty per cent level, in the context of diminishing not rising asset values, did this equation come unstuck and did it appear that it might be a financially sound practice to pay some tax

Of additional help were Australia's lax company and securities laws, low accountancy standards and light regulation and penal sanctions Differing state business laws do not encourage transparency Funds and the political will were lacking for corporate investigation Creative accountancy practices[12] could, for example, lead to public reporting of profits by companies such as Skase's Quintex group, in the 1987/8 financial year, projecting profit after tax to be higher than profit before tax.[13]

The mid-to-late 1980s saw debt financing moves into TV in a *big* way By early 1988 Alan Bond's companies accounted for ten per cent of Australia's external debt – and were among the companies which paid little to no tax.

Further assisting corporate debt in TV was the fact that all the new proprietors were taking their initial decisions in the midst of a share market and property boom But the share market boom ended in October 1987 – so it cannot account for the subsequent profligacy of 1988 and early 1989, although it can help account for the initial prices paid. The property market was levelling off by mid-1989, but like the real estate market in Sydney in this period, it had seemed that no matter how much was paid for a property, it would be able to be sold at a profit just down the line, leading to a form of pyramid selling

Changes in the operating rules, combined with easy credit in a deregulated financial market and Australian corporate practice did not simply inflate TV station prices, it blew them out. The value of the Nine and Ten networks doubled overnight.[14] Speculation in TV assets reached phenomenal proportions as the three networks acquired new owners. These new owners were prepared to pay a premium for such strategic positions in the Australian TV market The US broadcasting journal *Channels* put the prices graphically: Alan Bond's Bond Media paid $US88 per viewer for Nine; Frank Lowy's Westfield group paid $US80 for Ten; Christopher Skase's Quintex group paid $US49 for Seven [15] In the period stretching

12 Australia has a well known capacity for 'creative accountancy produced by the tendency for professional groupings to be self-regulated' and by the state (rather than federally) based nature of much corporate affairs legislation

13 Austin Donnelly, 'No tax – no profit The Independent Monthly May 1990, p 19

14 Max Walsh, Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April 1981 p 23 Walsh argued that Packer and Murdoch (who sold Ten) received a gift of $A1 billion as the value of their assets rose from $A800 million to $A1 8 billion For a discussion of these asset values see Julianne Schultz, Failing the public' in Helen Wilson (ed), Australian Communications and the Public Sphere (Melbourne Macmillan, 1989), pp 68–84

15 See Alex Ben Bock 'Who is Christopher Skase? Channels September 1988, p 46

from November 1986 to November 1987 Australia's three commercial TV networks, Nine, Seven and Ten, changed hands for an estimated $A2.5 billion. These prices made metropolitan Australian TV stations among the most expensive in the world.

The companies which bought into TV were not simply after media industry cash-flows to service interest payments to finance further corporate expansion. They were also acquiring assets which could be integrated into their other activities in complementary or 'synergistic' ways. Bond, for instance, was putting a package together that saw Bond University as a user for his satellite space (in the provision of distance education) alongside Sky Channel (a pub and club direct broadcast by satellite service) and the Nine Network The journalism students at Bond were to get work experience at Channel Nine (thereby giving its journalism school a competitive edge over rival ones) Bond University was also a 'real estate' development whose property values could be increased by siting a university in the neighbourhood. Bond's brewing and other national companies would be benefited by the Nine Network being within the same company stable: there was scope for integrated national marketing packages, including TV programme sponsorship. Finally, TV network ownership conferred a certain prestige value which could be traded in the dealings of the company in the marketplace and with government

Both the new network owners and the banks also believed the talk about the 'media' as a growth industry in the business of providing 'information services' and 'software' (as 1980s nomenclature came to describe the humble TV programme) Information was power Information was a (tradable) asset In late advanced capitalism, knowledge was power and therefore *control over knowledge was the route to greater power and wealth* The information sector was identified as the *development* sector So our property developers (Skase, Bond and Lowy) *moved in on knowledge*, bringing with them practices, accountancy techniques, and methods of asset development fine tuned over years in the property trade In short, information became property to be traded, markets were established in it Underlying these moves appeared to be a notion that 'information' asset values could be just as unrelated to cash flow and profit levels but, nonetheless, just as capable of enormous capital gains as property values It seemed that a new and immensely profitable market was developing, where property developers like Bond, Skase and Lowy could occupy strategic places In an emerging information economy, assets were now those previously intangible things that were only profitable in circulation· the fickle audiences and consumers of entertainment and information Getting into TV meant becoming part of the information revolution, in fact TV was a pivotal institution in this process And it was made more important by the convergence of

telecommunications and mass communications Skase and Bond played this game to the limit. They attempted to control as much intellectual property as they could. Bond extended his interests into Hong Kong TV and British satellite television, and into knowledge production itself with a university. Skase extended his interests to US production companies, and attempted to buy up the Hollywood major, United Artists

The Bonds, Lowys and Skases would have taken heart from the fact that during the 1980s American media stock changed hands at grossly inflated prices, and new players were entering that market with little or no media experience Debt financing was used there too.

Also, it was commonly assumed that, by the turn of the century, there would (in the words of a Time Warner executive), be only five or six large global communications companies. Skase and Bond, at least, wanted to have a shot at becoming one of those companies. Indeed, a trend towards international oligopoly characterized the 1980s in cinema, VCR markets, publishing, and cable-TV This trend is redrawing established connections within and between language markets, pushing the international book, the international TV programme (now including information and sporting programming), and, of course, that old familiar chestnut, the international film.

Coming unstuck

It is clear now just how misguided this game-plan was The TV industry was not complacent in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. Indeed, there simply was not room for rapid increases in advertising revenues there. Australia, according to 1984 rankings, was second only to the USA in terms of advertising expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product. Additionally, TV's total market share of advertising revenues compared favourably with equivalent market environments, Canada and the USA, where 'networking' was often held to be more advanced

The expected benefits from national integration were also based on some questionable assumptions, Firstly, *the national integration of advertising preceded by many years the national integration of programming.* Sophisticated national placement strategies had already evolved to get around the then relatively disconnected Australian TV system. Just because the networks were not doing the coordinating does not mean that efficient and effective coordination was not being done

Secondly, national integration of programming and the move to simultaneous programming produced mixed results. The previously mixed system, wherein connection and disconnection existed side by

side, permitted a degree of audience community knowledge about appropriate programme scheduling. The disconnected system accommodated the different climatic and cultural conditions pertaining in the different capitals. Subtropical Brisbane, for example, *does* go to sleep half an hour to an hour earlier than Sydney. Such programming flexibility and tailoring to local knowledges were now out The national programming which evolved was, perforce, most critically centred on fitting somewhere between Sydney and Melbourne. Under these conditions some of the benefits of a nationally integrated system were cancelled out by the losses associated with no longer having in place locally responsive scheduling. Accompanying the loss of flexibility in scheduling was a loss of local programme production capacity and identity The loss of both may well have cancelled out any positive response to the emergence of simultaneous national programming.

Thirdly, the extension of additional TV services to regional Australia is proving less than a licence to print money Regional TV companies are faced with the huge capital costs involved in building TV transmitters and signal translation facilities Problems of signal reach have also accompanied their move onto the UHF frequency – the worst possible frequency for signal transmission over distance The regional stations are just not able to be milked of profits as the US literature suggested they should have been. (Perhaps they can be in a decade's time! But by then cable will be around.) Indeed in many cases programming is being supplied at minimal cost to regionals so as to permit them to develop the infrastructure for the network of regional stations required by aggregation

The attempt to establish asset values unrelated to cash flows in the information sector overlooked the difference between property values and information market values. The stability and profitability of the Australian commercial TV industry was itself a product of practices, routines, cost monitoring, and managed competition in the context of viewers exercising consumer sovereignty. It was not a given Nor was it achieved by licence scarcity. Australia has had *five* well established quasi-national networks reaching sixty per cent of the viewing audience since the mid-1980s And it has had *four* quasi-national networks since 1965

Each of the new network proprietors had limited broadcasting experience. And this showed in their incapacity to manage costs and competition Each used debt not equity to finance their takeovers (replicating in part the US experience of broadcast deregulation) And this exposed them to high interest rates after 1988 and downturns in advertising revenues in 1990

Each, when faced with considerable interest bills in late 1988, engaged in cut-throat competition in an attempt to increase market share at each other's expense. The result was not increased audience shares but the opposite. Expenditure on local programmes and

imported programme costs dramatically escalated in the 1988/9 financial year: the cost of overseas programming doubled, local programme costs rose by nearly a third, and general expenditure increased by a third.[16] And this at a time of record domestic interest rates in Australia. Additionally, for at least two of these networks, Nine and Seven, management fees paid to the management team and parent company more than doubled in the same period (Such management fees were critical to Skase and Bond increasing their own personal wealth in the context of the 'publicly listed company' of which they were chief executives).

16 L Wright, TV incurs its first loss, Sydney Morning Herald 22 May 1989

As a result of the competition for programming, in early 1989 Australian networks entered into unprecedented output contracts with US production houses and, in the case of the Seven Network, signed an affiliation agreement with the American NBC network. Australia, with its 16.4 million people, was paying more for the broadcasting rights of *all* kinds of US TV than countries many times its population size, like the UK, Germany, Italy and Japan (of course, Australia has always paid more, per capita, than anywhere else for US programming). Additionally, it was now carrying part of the cost of developing programmes which US audiences, let alone Australian ones, would never see These moves to integrate the Australian TV market with the US market came from the Australian competition for 'scarce' US programme resources – and not from the US

The result· TV revenues, despite rising fifteen per cent in 1989 (and eighteen per cent in the financial year 1988/9), could barely meet the increased programming and networking costs. This left virtually no money to pay rising interest bills on debt The consequence: receivership for Seven (the Quintex group of companies owed $A1.4 billion); losses for Ten in addition to the $A280 million loss suffered by Lowy when he sold Ten in September 1989,[17] leading, in turn, to its receivership with the collapse of its owner, Northern Star Holdings, with debts of $A455 million; and problems in meeting its $A367 million debt for Bond Media. At the time of writing, in 1990, costs are being reigned in: domestic and imported production costs have been on average halved and management fees are the subject of corporate affairs investigations.

17 Candice Sutton The Sun-Herald 3 September 1989 p 6

The shake-out

What was left? Certainly not the ambition to be a global corporation. In its stead was the ambition to be the *Australian branch office* of a global corporation The Ten Network, exploiting loopholes in the Broadcasting Act prohibiting foreign ownership above twenty per cent, had ceded forty-four per cent of company control to foreign companies (including Thames TV, ten per cent,

Daily Mail & General Trust, 14 6 per cent, BT Australia, 11.5 per cent; and Murdoch's News Corporation, 4 9 per cent) in September 1989. But even this foreign shareholding was not enough to stave off receivers who were called in by the network's bankers in September 1990. In mid-1990 Bond Media executives dutifully plied the offices of US media companies seeking companies interested in an Australian junior partner. Reportedly they had a consortium lined up which included CBS, Paramount, a Paramount executive, TV New Zealand, and Banker's Trust, to take up a thirty per cent stake in Bond Media, providing a much needed capital injection into the company of some $A232 million.[18] International company integration, with Australia as an offshoot on the parent's terms, was set to occur.

This integration was supported by the banks The Australian clients to whom they had so assiduously extended credit lines were retrospectively labelled corporate 'cowboys'. They supported TV network moves to have the existing loophole permitting up to forty-nine cent foreign ownership regularized. They saw such moves as a way of turning their bad debt into good debt Their lobbying met with some early success. A lift of the foreign ownership level to forty to forty-nine per cent was mooted by Labor before the federal election Prime Minister Hawke was even alleged to have promised it to Nine's Chief, Sam Chisholm Creditors saw overseas investors, like the US networks and programme production suppliers, adding a premium of somewhere between thirty to forty per cent to the Network asking prices.[19] It was assumed that US and to a lesser extent UK media groups would want to keep in place the unparalleled arrangements the entrepreneurs had entered into with them, would want to keep alive their hopes of developing global perspective, and would have the added incentive of the cheaper price of money in the US market Of course this is not how the networks and banks represented the situation. These *individuals* were prepared to bail Australia out; they did not want to interfere in Australian programmes, after all, the regulatory authority, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, looked after that area effectively.

The Federal government, and more particularly its new Communications Minister, Kim Beazley, faced a stark choice. The loophole could be maintained or regularized – in which case all Australian networks would quickly become forty to forty-nine per cent foreign controlled and ultimately affiliated to the three major US TV networks, with consequences for the kind and nature of Australian commercial programming [20] Alternatively, there could be a return to twenty per cent foreign ownership which would leave each of the networks open to cheap takeover bids from Australian investors and leave the banks with substantial debts to write-off (an estimated $A2 billion of debt is currently being carried by the TV

18 *Variety* 30 May 1990 p 48

19 Tony Burchill 'Saga of woe continues for the embattled TV industry *Financial Review* (Australia), 8 May 1990

20 Alan Kohler *Sunday Age*, 13 May 1990

21 Megan Jones *Sunday Herald*, 29 March 1990

industry).[21] The Labor government, facing a Labor caucus on balance opposed to lifting the ownership ceiling as a means of 'bailing out' the banks and the entrepreneurs for their bad investment decisions, supported Beazley on a return to the twenty per cent ownership level. Beazley's decision should shift some of the loss (but not all) *onto the creditors rather than the TV audience and the production industry*.

In this context, the banks should be forced to accept write-downs in the value of the media assets they supported Indeed the effect of this ruling was immediate. Packer acquired a controlling interest in Bond Media. Similarly, the liquidators of the Seven Network will find it difficult to get the $A635 million price-tag they demanded for the network in January 1990 – and even the $A400 million reputedly offered for it then. To date the liquidator has been reluctant to see the price per earning ratio come down from the estimated 13:1 tag to the 5:1 ratio implicit in Packer's bid for Nine The liquidator will either sell now and face a $A235 million write-down, or hold on for twelve to eighteen months in the hope of obtaining a better price. Clearly the latter choice is not in the interests of industry stability and long term planning within the network. With the Ten Network just being placed into receivership, the prospect of two networks in long term receivership may well force the federal government to bow to pressure to revise upwards foreign ownership limits in the interests of both industry stability and to ensure that Kerry Packer does not become the Sylvio Berlusconi of Australian TV with de facto control over the Ten Network in addition to his control of Nine

The real issue is now who pays the most – the *TV industry* or *the banks* – for the corporate and lending madness of the late 1980s If it is the industry then it is likely to be continually in hock throughout the 1990s, with little hope of recovery in the short term. In this case ongoing local production difficulties and increased US TV content can be expected. If it is the banks who accept the losses and allow the write-down of media values to which they contributed so much, then some recovery in programme capacity can be expected in the next two years

As it stands now, the Australian TV industry management is being hit on at least three fronts: continuing high levels of debt, high interest rates, and a dramatic slow down in the rate of increase of advertising revenues (down to an estimated six per cent increase after a fifteen per cent increase in 1989) The resulting cost-cutting has led to a marked drop in the standard and quality of TV, which is starting to acquire a frumpy, undercapitalized image Already the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal has made concessions on Australian content levels and can be expected to make more Such concessions are in turn having their impact Australian programming has, since the late 1960s, been the pivot around which prime-time

ratings success has been hung. Its diminution and falling quality are leaving a gap in TV offerings to the public Cost-cutting does not just impact upon TV's standing with audiences – it also impacts upon advertisers As national content overall becomes further diminished, and what there is of it is increasingly impoverished, no amount of marketing in the short term will be able to convince audiences that there is something worth watching on TV – and that something would anyway be American TV. At times it seems the industry and the banks have forgotten that audiences are not permanently hooked to the set, and advertising is not exclusively oriented to TV Just as Ten's ratings suffered from the community perception of corporate failure and cost-cutting, the other networks will suffer as the news gets out. There is no cross-ownership now which could allow Fairfax, Packer or Murdoch to suppress adverse comment about TV in their newspapers, as was alleged to have happened in the past.

Now the TV industry is feeling the chill winds that swept over their film, documentary, and TV mini-series cousins after 1987. A new austerity has arrived. Gone are the $1 million parties to celebrate *Neighbours'* 1,000th episode Staff, from the bottom to the top, are being laid off, salaries cut, production shelved.

In this context, it is a cash strapped Australian government which is disproportionately carrying the can for continuity in production in the film industry. The Australian government, through the ABC, the Film Finance Corporation, SBS and the Australian Film Commission is keeping alive Australia's drama production capacity in terms of mini-series, one-off drama, and documentaries and, therefore, much of our international export profile Government agencies, not the private sector as such, are committing funds to TV and cinema production Even new proprietors like Kerry Packer would probably not contribute much in the short term A return to a stable oligopolistic environment would see new proprietors doing just enough to maintain an edge over competitors Packer's record, like his father's, was never one of destroying the competition – he simply wanted to maintain an edge

The lost possibilities of Australian TV

So an industry which had not lost money since 1957 finally did so in 1989 and 1990. This was a remarkable achievement TV networks were operating at a loss in an environment where advertising revenues did *not* decrease, indeed, actually increased well above inflation. Revenues have been increasing each year and at a healthy growth rate since 1980 This was *not* an industry hit by falling sales, by a recession, by diminishing returns; it was an industry hit by rising sales, an overheated economy and increasing returns

Many possibilities have been irretrievably lost to the Australian film industry. Unlike Europe and the UK, Australian TV had so much going for it. The period 1986–90 should have been the time when Australia consolidated its share of international TV programme markets It was so well placed. It already had a competitive TV market dedicated to producing relatively low cost TV drama and informational programming It was used to producing popular product, geared to ratings It was well placed to take advantage of the emerging export markets for popular TV which were opening up in Europe and the UK with the introduction of commercial TV, cable, and direct broadcasting by satellite As the older restricted and paternalistic services in the European system were being broken down, there had probably never been (apart from the beginning of the first world war) a more propitious time for Australia to get into international audiovisual export, secure a larger market niche and take advantage of what it did have [22] Furthermore, Australia had a comparatively debt free TV system. Apart from the capital requirements to enable equalization and the Perth licence, a TV system was already set in place with five-channel competition in the major capital city markets Each of the commercial licensees were either long-standing companies whose investment had been recouped many times over or were people who had not paid huge entry prices to get into the market. The existing Australian TV networks were thus well poised to take advantage of the changing profile of international TV and the development of demand for popular TV programmes

But Australian comparative advantages did not stop there. As of the mid-1980s, the structural impediments to an effective nationally coordinated market in TV programmes as distinct from a nationally coordinated market in advertising (which was there from inception) were removed Twenty-five years after a third commercial station came to Brisbane and Adelaide, Perth (now bigger than Adelaide) got a third licence, and equalization was set to permit the greater integration of regional markets into the national system For the first time it appeared that the whole of the TV system, not just the Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane segments of it, would pay equally for Australian programming At last true economics of scale were possible Changes in the basic technological infrastructure with AUSSAT and pricing policy also dramatically reduced the cost of sending messages over distance – so long as you sent a lot of them. Australian TV had the money now, and the technological infrastructure, for an expanded and higher budget production capacity in drama and informational programming areas Australia was, in short, 'lucky' The trauma and investment costs of establishing and managing a competitive environment were behind it (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, even the UK, were only now moving into this era). And the final pieces, conferring additional

22 For an excellent discussion of the opportunities Australian cinema groups deliberately eschewed in the teens of this century see Ina Bertrand and William Routt 'The big bad combine in A Moran and T O Regan (eds) Australian Screen (Ringwood Penguin 1989) pp 3–28

'economies of scale' in the national market, were now in place.

The Australian TV system was thus well poised in the international market, well able to produce a commodity capable of export into English language and European markets, capable of producing not simply more, but better quality, TV, well placed to manage *on its own terms* the popular audience oriented 'internationalization' taking place in the more profitable parts of the international TV system, and well able to develop a market niche as a medium-sized production centre

But it is now history that this did not happen. The Australian commercial TV system managed to successfully erode its comparative advantage of a debt free TV service and it acquired debts in excess of TV establishment costs It diminished its production levels and production capacity It increased production costs with no accompanying increase in standards – and then later stripped down productions with a loss in standards. It lost the possibility of managing internationalization on its own terms and so had it managed for it. It lost a possible place as a successful medium level international producer Now it was just another one struggling in a difficult environment.

While Europe was struggling with more TV stations reducing advertising revenues, and new TV programmes eating into audience shares, Australia was struggling with the same number of TV stations and relatively static audience shares Australia, awash with talk of the need for an international orientation, critically *turned inward not outward*. Instead of managing a competitive market environment as the Packers, Fairfaxes, *Herald & Weekly Times*, and Murdoch had, the entrepreneurs engaged in a critically destructive competition which squeezed margins, lifted production costs and the price of imported programming, which led to international integration with Australian TV, not as an importer and exporter of programming, *but principally as an importer*, looking for limited co-production oportunities In short, Australian commercial TV was not prepared to just get on with the business of Australian TV; it had to re-invent it

Conclusion

Is this Australian case a cautionary tale about too much deregulatory change occurring too quickly for an industry to handle it? Is it an example of over-blown ambitions to integrate information sectors coming unstuck? Is it an example, *in extremis*, of the 1980s culture of business in English language markets where debt replaced equity, where leveraged buy-outs ruled, where a management culture sought resources for itself with little sense of obligation to its public shareholders or employee base, where paper profits and artful

schemes of tax avoidance and minimization ruled over ethical business practice? Perhaps it is a combination of all of these. It is what happened when 'the market was left to decide', Australian style!

reviews

review article:

Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Language, Discourse, Society Series). London: Macmillan, 1989, 201 pp.

Constance Penley, *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1989, 207 pp.

Lucy Fischer, *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, 332 pp.

JANE M. GAINES

Three important books on feminist film theory have come out in the same year, all of them written by pioneers in the field: two are collections of the authors' essays written over the course of the formative years. Laura Mulvey, whose groundbreaking 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' first appeared in *Screen* in 1975,[1] has pulled together all of her writings, from 'The spectacle is vulnerable: Miss World, 1970' to 'The Oedipus myth· beyond the riddles of the sphinx', a 1987 lecture delivered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London The collection of Constance Penley's essays parallels the theoretical development of *Camera Obscura*: Penley is one of the cofounders and current editors of this well-established feminist film theory journal, which had its first issue in the Autumn of 1976. Lucy Fischer's early essay 'The image of woman as image. the optical politics of *Dames*' (*Film Quarterly*, no 30 [1976]) was a feminist milestone in its own right; and her new book has been expected to offer coherence with tradition, as well as new direction It does both, and as such is set to become another textbook option in the field, alongside E. Ann Kaplan's *Women and Film. Both Sides of the Camera* (Methuen, 1983) and Annette Kuhn's *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982)

This triple publication, then, provides an occasion for looking back as well as forward What was the appeal of the feminist film

theory which struggled for a place in the academy in the late 1970s, and in the 1980s came to constitute one of the greatest triumphs of film studies? If male critics within the field were once squeamish about using this theory, they by and large now refer to it without contest Concepts from feminist film theory have been productively introduced into other fields; notably art history, theatre history, and performance art theory, where new work on sexual looking is derived from the ideas of Mulvey and others [2] And yet a number of questions concerning the political implications of early feminist work on the image remain unresolved

As Mulvey sees it, the early emphasis on representation was premonitory of things to come – of that contemporary condition which theorists of the postmodern see as a disjunctive 'play' of the image divorced more and more from social 'reality'. It might also be said that feminist film theory anticipated the importance of woman's right to her body since, as Mulvey points out, similar issues circulate between the 'realm of representation' and the discourses of law and medicine Feminist film theory's provocative analysis of representation in white male culture has wide application outside 'high' feminist circles But where feminists working in film theory have fallen down is in their failure to make their best insights accessible to the larger feminist community. Why, for instance, did Women Against Pornography find such an easy audience in the USA for their version of 'images of women'? Where were we when Women's Studies programmes in the USA and elsewhere were jumping on Catharine MacKinnon's and Andrea Dworkin's anti-pornography bandwagon?[3] And yet we do see the political fruition of feminist film theory in such areas as Barbara Kruger's protest montage work. Although Mulvey gives herself no credit in her review of Kruger (included in *Visual and Other Pleasures*), the origins of the artist's concept of spectatorship are clear, especially in such works as *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face*. It is undeniable that Kruger's posters have effectively done the job of teaching about the politics of representation where 'avant-garde theory' films of the 1970s failed.

Mulvey's questions for herself have to do with priorities As she says 'In terms of my own history, I sometimes feel that the excitement, novelty and sheer difficulty of semiotic and psychoanalytic theory overwhelmed other political concerns and commitments The priority was to establish the psyche's political reality and its manifestation in image and representation' (*Visual and Other Pleasures*, p xii). And so it is still a question of the compatibility of political activism and heavy theory – in this case, psychoanalytic theory. Sensitive to the criticism that psychoanalytic theory cannot deal with the proper object of materialist analysis, Mulvey concedes that the challenge is 'to stay in touch with the contingencies of history, which might demand different strategies

2 See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference Femininity Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York Routledge 1988), Sue-Ellen Case *Feminism and Theatre* (New York Methuen, 1988) *Women and Performance A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol 3, no 2 (1987–8)

3 At least one new book has successfully applied the insights of feminist film theory to this end Linda Williams, *Hard Core Power Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1989) makes an interesting comparison with parts of Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1987)

without compromising principle'. (p xiv)

What she proposes, in the essay 'Changes. thoughts on myth, narrative. and historical experience' (from *History Workshop Journal*, 1987), is a kind of 'interweaving' in which the challenge is to move smoothly from the mythologies of oppression towards resistance This essay 'interweaves' Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie on popular revolt, Mulvey's own feminist film practice, and the Thatcher government's representation of the miners' strike. At one point, Mulvey discusses how in 1810 Mexicans rallied around the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in a revolt against the Spanish The image of the Black Virgin, she says, may be tied up with racial oppression, nationalist feelings and the pre-Oedipal before the loss of the mother. Here is a group of 'overdetermined irreconcilables', to be sure! But while Mulvey cautions that there is no easy analogy between colonization and the Oedipal rupture, I wonder about the political implications of force-fitting psychoanalytic constructs onto unwary cultural others Why must every aspect of human history always come down to the Oedipal?

Whereas Mulvey worries about the possibility that psychoanalytic theory's work may counter political change, Constance Penley will have no truck with feminist political guilt in this regard. Given that there is no straightforward connection between conscious and unconscious life, she asks, why should we expect a direct cause and effect relation between psychoanalysis and social change? Answering the charge that psychoanalytic theory is apolitical and that any hint of an unstable subjectivity puts feminists at a political disadvantage, Penley argues that this should not keep us from radical practice, for activism and psychoanalysis belong to different realms: 'Although the subject of the unconscious is divided, this does not mean that the social subject (which functions at a different level) cannot be cohesive, or at least cohesive enough to be able to enter into political groupings as a result of (more or less) conscious decision-making' (*The Future of an Illusion*, p. xviii) This issue arises, says Penley, because psychoanalysis is not easily compatible with the strong strains of pragmatism and utopianism in North American feminism

Lucy Fischer navigates her course around, rather than through, these issues, as if to say that we must move on. To this end, she introduces a whole new cast of feminist literary critics into the discussion of film; and many will welcome this. And yet the old paradigms still structure the book· the 'female repressed' becomes the reverse-angle view of the 'submerged counter-shot' In place of the feminist countercinema model, Fischer gives us an engaged 'intertextual debate' between feature films by women and dominant (still male) cinema. (George Cukor's *Rich and Famous* [1981] is paired with Claudia Weill's *Girlfriends* [1978]; Ingmar Bergman's

Persona [1966] with Mai Zetterling's *Flickorna/The Girls* [1969]; and Max Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* [1948] with Doris Dorrie's *Mitten ins Herz/Straight through the Heart* [1983].) This approach – which demands no strict aesthetic renunciation on the part of feminist directors – gets around the deadlock of what Mulvey now calls the 'negative aesthetics' of countercinema, with its visual 'scorched earth policy' (*Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 164). However, the notion of intertextuality neutralizes the relationship between feminist avant-garde works such as Yvonne Rainer's *The Man who Envied Women* (1985) and the canonical works to which the filmmaker refers, and to say that this relation is nothing more than 'intertextual' is to forgo the particularity of the relation, its sting and its critical bite.

While an intertextual approach is a corrective to the impractical idealism of a separate women's culture, it seems to take us back to where we were before we imagined feminist alternative cultures Fischer's book could easily give some feminist readers the impression that we have made our peace with men For others, *Shot/Countershot* might look like a further example of the elitist tendency in film studies, for its emphasis on directors harks back to high art auteurism. The new women directors of art cinema – not its female spectators – are the heroines of this book.

The Future of an Illusion closely follows the course of film studies, from 1970s 'apparatus' theory to the beginnings of work on television. In looking back, we are reminded of the importance of the feminist intervention in early discussions around post-1968 French theory Penley's critique of the structuralist/materialist film movement has never been fully registered within film theory, nor have her insights concerning the impossibility of subversion given cinema's structures of fascination Likewise, her essay on the 'bachelor machine' is commonly read as yet another characterization of cinema in the service of patriarchy, when it is rather an ingenious reading of Christian Metz's essay 'The imaginary signifier' as itself a 'bachelor apparatus' Penley's early essays belong to the Althusserian chapter of film theory, in which the field and its practitioners were consumed with the importance of showing how everything is finally ideological: the difficulty of the style of these essays is perhaps a function of the weightiness of that project However, the book's payoff comes with its two chapters on popular culture In 'Time travel, primal scene, and the critical dystopia', Penley argues that the problematic of science fiction cinema accentuates sexual difference, setting up, for instance, the erotics of the 'kiss across time' in *The Terminator* (1984). Finally, in her analysis of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (CBS, 1986), Penley tackles the question of the sexual maturity of CBS, using the occasion to consider whether the weirdness of Pee-wee's world is best conceived as *unheimlich*

Laura Mulvey is once again prophetic. In the years since 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' was first published, film theory has moved on to those 'other pleasures' of her book's title Film theory has given way to cultural theory: we can no longer restrict ourselves to studying only what cinema, that historically shortlived institution, sees

review:

Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*. London, Sydney and Wellington: Pandora Press, 1990, 330 pp.

BEVERLEY BROWN

Is it perverse that a book about hard core film pornography should offer so many diverse intellectual pleasures? Or that a text strongly oriented towards feminism should be so funny on such a serious subject? For *Hard Core* is something of a tour de force. It contains a vast array of information and detailed description, along with wonderful leaps of imagination and perspective and a running engagement with a whole series of existing debates. This is not the book for anyone looking for a hard and fast 'wham bam' definitive position on pornography.

Linda Williams begins from the simple but striking point that despite, or because of, pornography's status as a vastly contested set of issues, there have been few attempts to theorize pornography in a neutral, descriptive fashion Yet without such analysis, disputing the issues seems a bit previous and over-presumptive, especially since pornography is so often assigned an exemplary status – as the truth of the vicissitudes of sexuality through the ages, or as the essence of patriarchal violence and power, or as the structural embodiment of a masculine specularity and objectification of women that sums up the whole of western culture, high and low. By contrast, the everyday actualities of sexual writings and imageries are very much to the fore here as a point of contemplation While most of the numerous examples come from dominant instances of the genre, the book *Caught Looking*[1], an exercise in feminist pornography/erotica, is an important formative touchstone for Williams in her attempt to work out what pornography is about and when its modes might be acceptable or unacceptable, and why. Thus Williams does not totally

1 K Ellis et al *Caught Looking Feminism, Pornography and Censorship* (New York Caught Looking, 1986)

disavow issues and positions in her search for a neutral commentary. On the contrary, existing figures of debates provide the cue for questions, while Williams also (slightly uncomfortably) endorses various trends as potentially progressive.

Thus, in the name of description, the book offers at one level a nicely detailed genre study tracing developments from stag films before and after the invention of sound through to the emergence, in the early 1970s, of legal hard core of the variety inaugurated by *Deep Throat* (Damiano, 1972). An impressive repertoire of films is described (but not illustrated) en route. In this development Williams discerns an enumerated set of trends including greater narrative integration of sexual scenes; an increasing number of types of sexual acts portrayed in any one film, a shift of address from the presumptively male audience of the stag film to an audience of couples; the invention of the 'money shot' (visibly ejaculating penis) corresponding with an increasing focus on the representation of women's pleasure; and, generally, a contrast between the way stag films incite – without representing – sexual satisfaction and a modern mode of sexual/narrative conclusion A current manual for would-be pornographers by Stephen Ziplow (or perhaps, given a tradition of credits such as 'Will B. Hard', 'Ziplow') provides further instruction.

But this is far more than a careful documentation, fascinating as details of changes in editing and point of view shots might be. For pornography, suggests Williams, really *is* a theory of sexuality, not in Robin Morgan's sense of the prelude to rape, but on the contrary: 'cinematic hard core can be read as a theoretical speculation on and analysis of the mythically concrete pleasures it purports to display so directly and naturally' (p 275) To aid speculation, Williams provides an array of spectacular comparisons and connections that succeed rather well in opening up the possibility of actually thinking about pornography instead of being gripped by it or by the political problems it poses In a chapter on the prehistory of the genre, hard core finds its symptomatic origins in the equine and human motion studies by Stanford and Muybridge which are then linked to photographs of hysterics at Salpêtrière A later chapter compares pornography with another genre, the musical, in that both negotiate the disconnection of their musical/sexual 'numbers' in relation to narrative trajectory The limits of pleasure and danger are explored in a chapter on sadomasochism that finds patriarchal power and pleasure disrupted in what might seem its most contestable form In compiling and elaborating these themes, Williams draws upon and debates a wide body of literature, engaging feminism, Foucault, cultural/media studies, classic 'screen' theory, and the pornography debates engendered around Laura Mulvey's article on visual pleasure and narrative cinema [2]

If all this sounds a heady mix – and the book does have a sparky and slightly wild air of accumulation – this must be at least partly

2 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen* vol 16, no 3 (1975) John Ellis, 'Photography/pornography/art/ pornography, *Screen* vol 21, no 1 (1980) Paul Willemen Letter to John *Screen* vol 21 no 2 (1980) Claire Pajaczkowska The heterosexual presumption *Screen*, vol 22 no 1 (1981)

due to the way Williams approaches pornography as an object of analysis. On the one hand, she is insistent that hard core be understood in its specificity and not rendered as some eternal and exemplary moment On the other hand, she sees this specificity not as an essential uniqueness but rather as a coincidence of different aspects and levels of determination, combining elements of genre, culture, and phantasy organized around a principle of the visibility of sexuality and sexual difference. To give this formula substance necessarily involves a mix of concerns as well as a concern for how they mix

Nonetheless her main thesis is clearly articulated: whatever the concatenation of determining factors, hard core pornography today is suffering a crisis of representation of sexuality and sexual difference, an intensifying and deeply anxious search for the true signifiers of sexuality manifested in the early 1970s invention of the fetish of the 'money shot', the apotheosis of evidenced male pleasure which simultaneously attempts to satisfy the demand for credible visual (or, failing that, auditory) signifiers of female pleasure, the last 'frontier'. (Here Williams also offers an ingenious explanation for the popularity of rape-orgasm scenarios. She rejects the idea that what is involved here is some sort of myth about female masochism in which women enjoy being taken by force. On the contrary, what is at stake here is the *evidential* problem of how ever to know that female pleasure has occurred· rape being the least likely setting either for enjoyment or fabrications of bliss, evinced pleasure *must* be sincere since it is so unlikely. It is as if pornographic filmmakers are mad scientists or lawyers bent on producing the ultimate empirical test.) While this crisis might in some ways be seen as an almost inevitable development of the dynamics of the genre, Williams argues that it has also been precipitated by social developments, notably the demands of the women's movement and the culture of rising expectations associated with 'sexual liberation' in its widest sense. 'Crisis' for Williams evokes a moment when the contradictions and recuperations of the culture are at their most active and yet at the same time are in greatest flux and thus open to creative reworking.

In articulating this project of investigation, Williams takes off from two established strands of analysis, seeking to draw them together. Seeing pornography in the context of a history of sexuality, the work of Foucault is central in identifying sexuality as a great secret truth whose representation is endlessly incited and prescribed. Hard core is here located by reference to a genealogy that is both multiple and modern in its origins, taking *Discipline and Punish* to be as important as *The History of Sexuality* in providing a framework that describes a 'cognitive urge' to *know* sexuality in all its modes and to classify its immense varieties of designated perversions Williams places what Foucault dubs the typically

western *scientia sexualis* within the wider context of power—knowledge in its disciplinary grasp upon the human body Thus while speech and confession are central forms of truth in *History of Sexuality*, these are aligned (not totally successfully) with the specifically visual forms of knowledge that seek to measure and classify through observation. Pornography becomes, for Williams, a mode of 'involuntary confession' in which the body must evince and evidence its pleasures

For Williams, the present begins to emerge somewhere in the mid nineteenth century In written pornography, this is marked by a break between the eighteenth-century classics such as *Juliette* and *Fanny Hill* – where pornography functions as social criticism and satire often articulated in the disruptive voice of the woman – and, by contrast, the masculine obsessions of 'Walter' 's *My Secret Life* and Frank Harris's *My Life and Loves* – which evince a wish to measure, count and compare the varieties of physical and genital differences between individuals. Here we see already the characteristic will-to-knowledge of the *scientia sexualis* that, according to Williams, also drives and shapes masculine sexual pleasure in the modern age.

This compulsion to know about sex takes on a distinctive form when it meets the early technology of the camera as used in motion studies On the one hand, the dominant concern here is a wider fascination with bodily observation, equine and human – a specific form of knowing through seeing and making visible. Here the powers of technology offer a form of omnipotent obsessiveness, a capacity to measure and differentiate that is infinitely more precise and powerful than the human eye, and to represent the body in a form of hallucinatory immediacy that transcends everyday experience. Hence, very neatly, goodbye to representationalist accounts that characterize the camera as the best possible substitute for human perception, as functioning in a direct relation with the real on the contrary, this is a domain of hyper-knowledge. Hence too what Williams calls, adapting Comolli's term, 'the frenzy of the visible', meaning the drive to know the body through a principle of maximum visibility. And where more minutely is this principle to be applied than in the field of the sexual, whose secrets are so easily hid by bad lighting and awkward sexual poses ('Ziplow notes that "cunnilingus presents technical difficulties" of visibility . . [but] his advice in both cases [cunnilingus and fellatio] is to block out the action well in advance' [p 127])? And what more recalcitrant to visibility than women's pleasure?

The other strand of interest here is obviously and necessarily the representation of the feminine Following Annette Kuhn, Williams defines pornography as 'a genre that wants to be about sex On close inspection, however, it always turns out to be about gender' (p 267) Already in the Muybridge studies, Williams has found a

difference that she labels fetishism men do things and have tasks while women are there to be seen, are more embedded in the mise-en-scene, are over-aestheticized, perform functionless gestures, and are presented in scenarios that invite fantasy. In this tradition too must be located the debates about pornography focused on Mulvey's account of fetishism, voyeurism, sadism and narrative in classic Hollywood cinema. But, in an attempt to dislodge the primordial status of the castration from whose denial all else flows, Williams rearranges the issues somewhat. Through Foucault she inverts the relation between knowledge and desire, so that a culturally defined scopic curiosity about sex is prior to any pleasurable by-products

In Irigaray she finds an equally contingent cultural association of castration and the masculine privileging of seeing as an arbitrary and singular system of knowledge; hence the idea that even the most attentively obsessive focus on female difference will ultimately construct that difference self-referentially so that the 'speculum' equates with masculine narcissism The fact that Irigaray traces this formation back to Plato throws a slight spanner in the works as far as Williams's modernity thesis is concerned, but it nonetheless allows her to characterize the elusive visibility of female pleasure as a cultural 'blind spot' that can be repaired within that culture only through various narcissistic equations of female and male pleasure, denials of difference in which the 'money shot' can stand – and fall – equally for male and for female pleasure; for if the invisibility of the female orgasm poses the ultimate conundrum, this simply re-emphasizes the fact that a mere penis can never be adequate to the proportions of phallic omnipotence.

Yet in Williams's analysis, the emergence of this 'crisis' must be more than the problematic of representing sexual difference no matter how far driven by the insatiability of the doomed drive towards maximum visibility which, constitutionally expansionist, seeks ever more territories to know, more perversions to include, inevitably seeking to annex women's pleasure At this level, she seeks to locate pornography in a more conjunctural form of analysis, likening pornography to musicals as offering magical ways of resolving specific problems and contradictions of the culture The similarities Williams produces some might see as frivolous or overworked (masturbation as a solo number, straight genital sex as the classic heterosexual love duet, and so on), but in the context of this book they operate at worst as exuberant excess in a nicely sustained comparison whose real centre is the way that sexual/musical 'numbers' work in relation to the narrative For one of the key genre problems about applying notions of fetishism to pornography is that sexual scenes, although somewhat disconnected, do not retard the narrative but propel it forward. Thus, taking up a remark by Paul Willemen, Williams's comparison of pornography with the musical involves showing how 'numbers' actually work

with, not against, narrative flow by posing or resolving problems in a stylized form While the ultimate cultural problems may remain finally unsaid, at least we have available the 'presenting' problems and the fantasy solutions that posit a realm of perfect natural sexual performance and pleasure.

However, while Williams might appear merely to offer a slightly differently inflected version of the idea of a male and masculine spectatorial knowledge position, she also seeks to challenge the alleged fixity and reactionary quality of these structures The variety of identifications available in sadomasochism means that the viewer is not imprisoned in the victim position (offered so triumphantly in Angela Dworkin's recently published novel, *Mercy*), but oscillates between subject positions The concern with women's pleasure, despite its currently male narcissistic modes of representation, may at least offer an opening, as it were at any rate, a sense of the fragility of the powers of pleasure offers some deconstructive hopes. Similarly, the multiplicity of potential perversions may at the very least facilitate new modes of sexual representation, and at most set in train a great reversal of values in which Foucault's sense of the 'implantation of perversions' may be extended to all indirect representations of pleasure, and, even further, if a Lacanian emphasis on the essentially substitutive structure of desire may be used to suggest that *all* object choice is fetishistically perverse, cover the very domain of the 'normal'. Personally, I am charmed but not convinced. This extension of the category of perversion to cover all desire reminds me of the fairytale of the tinderbox, where the dog with eyes as big as millwheels covered up his master's tracks by marking all doors the same

(Many thanks to Mandy Merck for clarifying aspects of Williams's book for me)

review:

Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*. New York: Routledge, 1989, 278 pp.

CONSTANCE BALIDES

Memory and history – the subtitle and focus of *Flashbacks in Film* – are implicated terms. In one sense, they refer to distinct spheres of experience, private and public, which invoke different conceptions of past events: memory as the messy tangle of past occurrences made meaningful through the disorder of unconscious logics, history as ordered stories of the past, authorized by institutional procedures. The notion that memory and history mark the difference between private and public spheres is not, however, as stable as might first appear It has been argued that particular kinds of memory are possible (or impossible) in certain historical periods.[1] And debates in historiography have stressed the mutual imbrication of memory and history.[2]

For Turim flashbacks are located along the permeable boundary where memory and history meet:

> If flashbacks give us images of memory, the personal archives of the past, they also give us images of history, the shared and recorded past. In fact, flashbacks in film often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience. (p 2)

More particularly, *Flashbacks in Film* is a wide-ranging history of developments in the flashback. It covers various periods (silent Hollywood film, the European avant garde in the 1920s, Hollywood sound film from the 1930s to the 1950s, 1940s psychological melodrama and film noir, and post World War II modernism) and

1 For example by Walter Benjamin in *Charles Baudelaire A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London New Left Books 1973), and by Fredric Jameson in Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism' *New Left Review* no 146 (1984) pp 53–92
2 For a discussion of popular memory along these lines, see Michel Foucault Interview' in Claire Johnston (ed), *Edinburgh 77 Magazine History/ Production/Memory*, no 2 (1977) pp 20–5 and Richard Johnson Gregor McLennan Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds), *Making Histories Studies in History Writing and Politics* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 1982) The feminist argument that the personal is political of course, throws doubt on any conceptions of the personal and the public as firmly distinct spheres

discusses films from various national contexts (including the USA, France, Sweden and Japan) Much of the book is devoted to detailed analyses of films, where a number of precise distinctions between types of flashbacks are made and where the diverse ways flashbacks have functioned are elaborated. Turim is concerned to go beyond the parameters of an aesthetic history, analyzing the flashback as a multidimensional phenomenon involving film form, film history, theories of memory, constructions of subjectivity, and ideology.

One of the most interesting and productive moves Turim makes is to extend a discussion of a formal device to include historical accounts of the relationship between memory and history. In this regard, flashbacks can be seen as a kind of filmic test case for debates in contemporary historiography and critical theory. Turim, however, specifically looks to historical theories of memory in philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis. Henri Bergson's and Marcel Proust's accounts of subjective memory are used in her analysis of French avant-garde film of the 1920s – for example, the screenplay of *Le Silence* (1921) and the films *Ménilmontant* (1929) and *La Maternelle* (1933). She notes that both Bergson and Proust stress the affective power of memory in the present and the evocative capacity of objects and sensations. Turim argues that French avant-garde film represents memory in a similar way: in these films 'the objective world is subsumed in a subjective response' where 'flashbacks infuse the present with the weight of the past', turning the present into a subjective memory image (p 67)

Turim also discusses the historiography of philosopher R G. Collingwood, who, she argues, foregrounds the importance of the historian's experience of memory in establishing a particular relationship to the past· she relates Collingwood's theories to Hollywood sound films that treat history as the subjective experience of an individual character, for example in biographical flashback films such as *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941) In addition, Sigmund Freud's notions of fate neurosis, repetition compulsion, and the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are discussed in relation to films noirs such as *Out of the Past* (Tourneur, 1947) and *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946) Turim describes the film noir's male protagonist as being compulsively attached to a woman in the past who functions as a figure of death; and stresses the fatalism of noir flashbacks, which implicate the present in a structure of pessimistic determinism.

Turim certainly fulfils one of the goals of her project, namely, to elaborate the complexity and richness of the flashback as a device On the general issue of histories that are attentive to discourses, however, there is perhaps a lack of good fit in attempts to integrate attention to historical discursive formations with concern for what is specific to film as a signifying practice. A discursive history,

3   See Michel Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York Pantheon Books, 1972)

particularly as it might be seen to develop out of Michel Foucault's work, would be concerned with assessing the regularities and discontinuities across texts rather than with respecting the boundaries of a text or a cultural practice.[3] Although Turim discusses historical theories of memory and speculates on the way a French audience would understand a modernist film like *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959), her characterization of the activity of the spectator here bears the mark of a formal rather than an historical distinction, since it invokes the conception of a position for the spectator that is generalizable from particular textual strategies. This argument rearticulates a commonplace concern in film studies for the specificity of film. Turim is, of course, concerned with form and is not writing a Foucauldian history. However, this does signal a more general problem in histories that extend a concern for formal specificity to include a discussion of discourses.

If *Flashbacks in Film* moves in the direction of a wider discursive field, it also intervenes in recent debates about history in film studies, particularly those concerning the relationship between history and theory Part of Turim's intervention lies in the care with which she negotiates this relationship; and she is appropriately self-conscious regarding the methodology of her study. Citing Jean-Louis Comolli on the ideological implications of evolutionary, developmental histories, Turim notes her own concern to avoid such models. She points to problems of questions of origin in relation to the flashback, arguing instead for a consideration of its various functions She also rejects an approach that would prioritize quantification or base its claims in empiricism, noting that her history is necessarily selective and concerned with broader theoretical issues, particularly 'what vision of memory, history, and narrative are evoked by [flashbacks]' (p. 26)

While Turim incorporates certain arguments about history writing in film studies, she also avoids the excesses of those arguments She offers qualified generalizations regarding the way flashbacks function in each historical period, and refrains from making rash claims concerning the political implications of texts disrupted by contradictions In Hollywood sound films from the 1930s to the 1950s, for example, she notes that 'subversive structuration' of the flashback is 'rare' and comments that flashbacks tend 'to evoke subjectivity, identification, and the framing of the past in the service of ideological representations of history'. (p 142) Moreover:

> The films frame a way of viewing and remembering the past, they frame the subject in history. While we might view these films critically, deconstructively, transgressing those frames   the framing process should never remain as invisible to our analysis
>   . (p. 142)

In this regard, Turim appears to take up criticisms by Kristin

4 Kristin Thompson and David
Bordwell 'Lineanty matenalism
and the study of early American
cinema', *Wide Angle* vol 5 no
3 (1983) pp 4–15

Thompson and David Bordwell of the work of Comolli and Jean
Narboni in *Cahiers du cinéma*, as well as the work of Noel Burch,
for being overly theorized and placing history at the service of a
prescriptive argument about ideology.[4] While she describes her own
project as a theoretical one, and does not argue, as do Thompson
and Bordwell that the first steps towards an alternative
historiography would lie in the direction of more traditional
historical values (appropriate use of evidence, attention to primary
sources, and a research base which includes an adequate sampling of
films), Turim has clearly taken their critique into account: she
includes a large number of films in her discussion, and is concerned
to cover a wide range of historical periods and national cinemas. At
the same time, her analyses show flashbacks to be the place where a
film's ideological project can be complicated In *The Last Command*
(Von Sternberg, 1928), for example, she notes that the flashbacks
become the site where the film's political sympathies are reversed in
a reactionary direction. In *Possessed* (Bernhardt, 1947), a normative
male point of view on the female protagonist's insanity is
contradicted by that character's subjective experience, which
foregrounds the way social conditions have produced her as deviant

In other words, Turim walks a fine line to achieve a middle
ground between Comolli/Narboni and Thompson/Bordwell On the
one hand, she foregrounds the selective nature of her study, but also
covers a large field; on the other, she addresses ideological issues,
but makes restrained claims for the political subversiveness of texts.
A general problem facing any work that occupies this middle
ground, however, is a tension between the scope of evidence
deemed to be necessary (where does one stop?) and the status of
general theoretical claims (how general can such claims be while still
remaining accurate?). A disadvantage is that analyses of films can
become too enumerative or too concerned with covering evidential
ground, and a clear line of theoretical argument may be submerged
in discussions of the specific operations of particular cases

The path between history and theory that Turim negotiates is a
rocky road in film studies Turim intervenes in this debate by
integrating history and theory in a historical project She achieves
this by using a range of theoretical frameworks – formalism,
structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, theories of
memory and consciousness, and ideological analysis – to establish
agendas for her film analyses. Moreover, she makes a general
argument for a flexible methodological approach, given that 'one
perspective lays the groundwork for another or opens inquiries
outside the frame of the other methods' (p. 14), and stresses the
value of not limiting her project to a single theoretical vantage
point

The heart of Turim's project lies in her detailed film analyses and
her concern with film form her integration of history and theory is

5 For example David Bordwell,
Narration in the Fiction Film
(London Methuen, 1985), David
Bordwell Janet Staiger and
Kristin Thompson, The Classical
Hollywood Cinema Film Style
and Mode of Production to 1960
(New York Columbia University
Press, 1985), and Kristin
Thompson, Breaking the Glass
Armor Neoformalist Film
Analysis (Princeton Princeton
University Press, 1988)

6 See Dana B Polan, Terminable
and interminable analysis
formalism and film theory',
Quarterly Review of Film Studies
vol 8 no 4 (1983) pp 69–77,
and Thompson in Breaking the
Glass Armor for her reply to
Polan Also see Barry King,
' "The classical Hollywood
cinema" ', Screen, vol 27, no 6
(1986) pp 74–88, and Barry
King 'The story continues, or the
Wisconsin Project part II',
Screen, vol 28, no 3 (1987), pp
56–82 For replies to King's
critique, which all appear in
Screen vol 29 no 1 (1988), see
Kristin Thompson, 'Wisconsin
Project or King's projection?', pp
48–53, Janet Staiger, 'Reading
King's reading', pp 54–70, and
David Bordwell, 'Adventures in
the highlands of theory', pp
72–97 King responds in A reply
to Bordwell Staiger and
Thompson', Screen, vol 29, no 1
(1988) pp 98–118

7 This is particularly addressed in
Barry King, 'The story continues'

8 See David Bordwell Making
Meaning Inference and Rhetoric
in the Interpretation of Cinema
(Cambridge, MA Harvard
University Press, 1989)

9 Michel Foucault 'Nietzsche
genealogy, history in Donald F
Bouchard (ed), Language,
Counter-Memory Practice
Selected Essays and Interviews
(Ithaca, NY Cornell University
Press 1977) pp 139–64,
Freidrich Nietzsche, The Use and
Abuse of History (New York
Macmillan Publishing Company
1986)

effected predominantly by pushing a formalist historical analysis of films in the direction of theoretically informed interpretations. In this regard, it is useful to locate Turim's study within the debate that has surrounded the neoformalist analyses and histories of Thompson Bordwell, and Janet Staiger,[5] particularly since this debate has established certain terms for thinking about the relationship between history and theory in film studies.

The debate between history and theory is neither new nor is it even one debate. From critiques of nineteenth-century philosophies of history to the opposition between E. P. Thompson and Louis Althusser in the 1970s, the relationship between history and theory has been the subject of much argument. However, as it has recently been discussed within film studies, and more particularly in Screen,[6] a key issue is the amenability of neoformalist analyses to ideological, psychoanalytic and, more generally, interpretive analyses of films. If Turim's project is to integrate formal analysis with interpretation and with a notion of the spectator indebted to psychoanalysis, there remains a question regarding the compatibility between formalist analysis and other interpretive frameworks. For example, in relation to the spectator, would a theory of the flashback need a consistent theory of the subject? It has been argued that there is a disparity between the spectator of a formalist approach, as theorized in neoformalist analyses, and the spectator of psychoanalysis.[7] Another question relates to the status of interpretation in film history more generally. Even if one stresses the necessary selectivity of any project, as Turim rightly does, there is still the problem that interpretation involves the possibility of endlessly receding versions of a film.[8]

This leads to the general issue of Turim's use of theory. She correctly notes that each theoretical framework foregrounds different issues and ways of approaching the analysis of a film text The difficulty with her formulation, though, is that explanatory frameworks are not only frameworks of meaning: they implicate any particular discipline in struggles over the legitimacy of interpretations. While Turim is committed to a feminist analysis of film, histories in which feminism is an explicit theoretical framework negotiate the relations between history and theory somewhat differently and in part by foregrounding their interested status. The issue of struggle over meaning is also invoked in the notion of perspectivism which Foucault, following Nietzsche, discusses in relation to historical interpretation.[9] In other words, the history/theory problematic implicit in Flashbacks in Film is, as Turim would certainly agree, only one frame among others on history writing itself.

Yet Flashbacks in Film negotiates this frame with a concern for the political implications of how flashbacks represent history and memory, and with a good deal of finesse. It is an extensive historical

study of a filmic device, and a rich resource on a range of films. By bringing the flashback to the fore and theorizing its functioning, Turim brings a new kind of attention to a device more often naturalized in the haze associated with its shifting temporality.